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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"IT IS VERY BEAUTIFUL! MR. ADAIR. WHAT GENIUS YOU HAVE! AND, IF YOU PLEASE, IS IT A GIFT TO SIR EUSTACE?"
— WAS FINELLA'S ADMIRING COMMENT.

A MAN OF SORROWS.

By the Author of "Poor Little Val,"
"The Valley Farm," &c., &c.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

"AND now, Miss Finella, I think I may safely leave you. You will have no further difficulty, and there is no changing between Bristol and Sandfield, so you can come to no harm. I hope, my dear, you will find your relations kind and good. If not—well, you have my wife's

address, and you go to her. She will help you, for 'pon my word, she's the best woman in the world."

"She should be if she is worthy of you," said the girl, with a grateful glance. "Captain Moody, my own father, could not have been kinder to me than you have, and I can never, never thank you enough. I wish I could do something to prove how very grateful I am."

"Pooh!" said the gallant captain. "You make so much of trifles, and I want no thanks. I daresay, my dear, you will find life here very different to your free-and-easy one over at Melbourne, but you will get accustomed to it if your people are kind; and, if not, you have your remedy in your hands."

They were standing on one of the platforms of the Bristol terminus, heedless of the passing throngs, and Finella's hand was resting lightly on the captain's arm; when a voice close by asked,—

"I beg pardon, but am I not addressing Miss Gray?" and, turning, they saw a comely woman of dignified presence.

Finella, a little wondering, answered in the affirmative.

"I thought I was not mistaken. I am Mrs. Kemp, the housekeeper of Gray's Folly, and Sir Eustace has sent me to meet you." Whilst she spoke she glanced questioningly at the girl's companion.

"My cousin is very kind," Finella said. "Indeed, everybody has been so to me. Mrs. Kemp, allow me to make you known to

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my dear friend, Captain Moody, of the *Protos*, the ship in which I came over."

The housekeeper bowed profoundly, and that without abating a jot of her dignity; and the captain, after a few hearty words, said he must leave them, as he had to drive to St. Philip's station, and would not miss his train for the world. He actually blushed, when, after one moment's hesitation, Finella put an arm about his neck, and, with tears in her pretty eyes, kissed his bearded mouth.

"Good-bye, dear friend," she said. "I shall never forget you," and a moment later she stood alone with Mrs. Kemp, and very soon they were speedily on their journey towards Sandfield."

"Sir Eustace thought you would be frightened at the prospect of a journey alone, and insisted that I should meet you and bring you on to Sandfield," said the worthy woman, who was thinking all the while that Finella had none of the family beauty.

"It was very good of him, and I am sure you are kind to take so much trouble for me. It did seem strange and terrible to be all alone in a foreign country."

"Hardly foreign, seeing it is your father's land," smiled Mrs. Kemp.

"Yes," the girl assented; "but then I have lived all my life in Australia, and but for papa's death, should have ended my days there."

"And your mamma, miss? Do you remember her at all?"

"Oh, she lived until I was twelve. I have often thought if my grandfather had known her he would have forgiven papa for marrying (as he thought) so much beneath him. But then, we don't think much of class distinctions in Australia."

"I suppose not. And was your mamma so very lovely?"

"I thought her so; but I have sometimes heard people wonder why papa married her, and heard them say she had not so much as a single good feature. But then she was so kind and good, so wise and yet so gentle, that folks could not help loving her; and I believe I hated Sir Ethelbert because he despised her—she was only a poor actress, you know—but she would never hear me say one word against him. After she died nothing prospered with us. Papa lost all hope and all energy, and gradually we lost all we ever possessed."

The young lips quivered, the grey eyes filled, and with a sudden thrill of sympathy the stately housekeeper leant forward and kissed the pale face.

"Poor child! You have had a chequered career; but I hope now that happier days have dawned for you. Do I presume too far when I ask why you allowed six months to elapse between your father's death and your embarkation?"

"Oh, no! I like to talk to you of these things. There were generous friends out there—at Melbourne, I mean—and they would fain have kept me with them always; but knowing my father's wishes they did not urge this; only they waited for Captain Moody's coming, because, they said, he would take great care of me—and, indeed, he nobly fulfilled his trust!"

Silence fell upon them for awhile, and if Mrs. Kemp's thoughts had been transcribed they would have all read thus,—

"She is very nice and unaffected—quite a lady, too, for all that her mother was a third-rate actress! But she isn't a beauty; she isn't even pretty, although her eyes are good, and her hair splendid. I wonder what Sir Eustace will think of her!"

Then her meditations were broken in upon by Finella.

"Will you tell me, please, if my cousin is

married? It seems so absurd to be ignorant as I am of one's own relations."

"Married!" said Mrs. Kemp, with a start. "Good gracious, no!" Then, more quietly, "There's plenty of time for that; he's only thirty. It is you, miss, who will be really mistress of the Folly."

"I!" in great alarm. "Oh, no! I could not usurp your position, and I am far, far too inexperienced to manage so large a household. There will be many things for me to learn of you, dear Mrs. Kemp," and the girl's sweet humility was very pleasing to the housekeeper.

She had reigned so long at Gray's Folly that it would be hard, indeed, to find her place usurped by this little pale girl of nineteen.

Her tone was very affectionate as she said,—

"It will be for Sir Eustace to decide that, my dear."

"And he will decide in your favour," almost brightly. "Oh, Mrs. Kemp, I do so dread our first meeting. Is he very grave and austere? Do you think he will be kind to me?"

"He is neither austere nor unkind (although he is grave), but one of the noblest of creatures. He will be good to you, do not fear."

"Tell me more about him; everything seems so strange to me yet. Is my cousin tall or short, handsome, or plain like me?" and Mrs. Kemp smiled at the naive question, then sighed, as she answered,—

"Sir Eustace is very handsome; but you will see him yourself soon, and be able to form your own opinion."

Finella did not interrogate her further. The housekeeper's reticence concerning her master was borne a trifle unpleasantly upon her, and for the rest of the journey she was very quiet.

At Sandfield they found a handsomely-appointed carriage awaiting them, and, without a word, Finella entered.

Mrs. Kemp noticed she was very pale and trembling.

"You must not doubt your welcome," she said, in a motherly way. "Sir Eustace is very glad to have you;" but the girl made no reply.

So, in utter silence, they drove down the lovely road, up a perfectly-kept drive, shadowed by stately elms, and so came to the hall door, which was opened to them by a grave-looking servant.

"Will you follow me, miss, if you please?" said Mrs. Kemp; and chilled by the apparent coldness of her reception, Finella traversed the long marble-paved hall, and came at last to a room the doors of which were flung open.

At the far end she saw a man seated in a low chair, his handsome head thrown back, and his pale, beautiful face (expressive of weariness) turned towards the lovely grounds by which the Folly was surrounded.

A long brown beard descended almost to his waist, hiding the sweetness of the sorrowful mouth, but nothing could hide the gentle kindness of the large dark eyes, soft as a gazelle's, sad as those of the Madonna.

As he caught the swish of Mrs. Kemp's skirts he started, and, flushing a little, rose slowly; and then, to Finella's great pain, she saw that with all his beauty of features he was a hunchback, that he walked only by the greatest effort; and that though the upper part of his body was of ordinary size, he yet stood no higher than herself. A great rush of pity made her forget all fear, and when Mrs. Kemp said,—

"Sir Eustace, this is Miss Finella," she went hastily forward, bent upon saving him every one of those painful steps, and lay-

ing both her little hands in his, said, tremulously,—

"Dear cousin, how shall I thank you for my beautiful home, and all your goodness to me?"

And with that she stooped her face in all innocence to his and kissed him gently on the mouth—since his mother died no woman had so caressed him.

He was more moved, more shaken than he would show, being always so horribly alive to his deformity, believing that a stranger could feel nothing but repugnance towards him; and his voice was less steady than usual as he bade her welcome, and said how glad he was to have "Uncle Courtenay's" child with him; and how much he loved that uncle's memory.

"We must be good friends for your father's sake," he added; "and if there is anything in the arrangement of your rooms that you would wish altered, please do not scruple to say so. Until you marry, or are tired of me, you are virtually mistress here. And now, Kemp, take Miss Finella to her room. Do not trouble to dress to-day, cousin; we shall dine alone."

They went upstairs together, and Finella was very quiet. She hardly spoke whilst Kemp unrolled her modest trunks, but stood looking from a window on to the lovely world below, whilst the housekeeper glanced curiously at her from time to time.

Then suddenly she turned, her eyes all filled with tears, and laying her arms about the good woman's neck, said,—

"Oh, I did not know, I could not even guess at the truth. You must teach me how to help him, how to make him happy! I hope, oh, yes, with all my heart, I hope I did not show my sorrow and the dreadful shock I felt when he came to meet me?"

"You did not, dear," said Mrs. Kemp, profoundly moved by the girl's emotion. "I ought to have prepared you, perhaps; but, somehow, I can't speak easily of the master's deformity. Perhaps it is because I hate to think that one day Alden Gray or his children will reign here instead of Sir Eustace."

"And who is Alden Gray?" asked Finella, still clinging about her.

"A second cousin of yours, miss, and a bad man, although Sir Eustace won't believe it. Oh, never fear, but you will see him soon enough; he will come here when he has spent every penny he borrowed of my master. He is a plausible villain, and I warn you now, my dear—I beg your pardon—miss, against him."

"I like you to call me my caressing names," Finella said, simply. "It seems to take away so much loneliness. Is that the dinner bell? I must not keep my cousin waiting; it would give him such a poor idea of my punctuality," and then they went down to the dining-room, where Mrs. Kemp left her.

"Well," thought the housekeeper, "she may not be a beauty, but she has a heart of gold; and if her mother had such winning ways poor Mr. Courtenay might well be forgiven for marrying her. I hope Sir Eustace will find comfort in her companionship."

It was a novel experience for the hunchback to see a bright face smiling at him across the table, altogether a novel thing to listen to such clear, liquid tones. He never went abroad, save in his carriage; never broke bread in any man's house, being too painfully conscious of his own deformity to visit or receive; and he felt a strange, new pleasure in looking at his little cousin, in listening to her innocent talk.

Now, as she leaned forward, her face slightly flushed, and made the fairer by contrast with her high-black gown, Sir Eustace felt as if a veritable good angel

had entered his home. She had shown none of that shocked surprise at his deformity he had so often winced beneath; she was just as bright and pleasant as though he had been an Adonis.

"You are bewitching me," he said, with his sad smile. "I have not talked so much for years." And then he rose and went with her to the drawing-room, and she made a farce of leaning upon his arm, that she might not remind him that he was different to other men.

There was no sense of restraint or shyness in her manner towards him; her deep pity had swallowed up every other thought or feeling, and when he asked her to sing she went towards the piano without hesitation.

Smiling back at him, she said,—

"It is a shame such a poor performer as I should touch this lovely instrument; but, remember, cousin, I warned you of my deficiencies;" and then she sang some sweet old English and Scotch ballads in a tender, unaffected style, which pleased Sir Eustace greatly.

And when she had ended he called her to him, and making her sit beside him, asked if she would like to make the study of music her amusement.

She looked a little scared.

"I am afraid I should never make a brilliant pianist, and I should stand in such great awe of my master that I should get confused."

"But what if I taught you?"

"Will you?" eagerly. "Won't it be a trouble to you? I am so stupid."

"Suppose you leave me to form my own opinion on that subject," smiling at her. "Well, you may consider yourself my pupil after to-morrow, and now go to bed. You must be tired. Good-night, Finella, and may you be happy with us."

CHAPTER II.

SHE was awakened the next morning by a burst of music, "so mighty, so pure, so clear," that she half believed herself still dreaming.

From whence did it come? Whose hands were those drawing the very soul out of the organ?

She rose hastily, and, dressing, went downstairs, meeting Kemp on her way.

"Oh!" she said, breathlessly. "How lovely it is! And where does it come from?"

"The master's study, miss. He is usually up early and at his organ. He loves it like a human creature. It is just his one solace; and he makes it speak according to his mood."

"If I might go in—" the girl began, hesitatingly.

"Do; he will be pleased to know you appreciate his music. Come with me, Miss Finella, and I will show you the study. Go in quietly, and stay until he finishes. I don't think he cares to be disturbed. Dear, your coming has done him good already. He looked so cheerful when he came down this morning that I scarcely could refrain from remarking upon it to him. This is the study; go in, his back is towards you; and he is so wrapped in his music he won't hear you enter."

So Finella stole in noiselessly.

She stood, still as a statue; her head bent a little forward in an eager, listening attitude, her hands lightly clasped before her, and her eyes shining with awed delight.

She did not know what he was playing, she only felt that never before had music spoken to her as now it did. Her spirit caught the enthusiasm of his, and she trembled with her excitement.

Then suddenly Sir Eustace broke into the "Dead March" from *Saul*. She knew

that, and she shivered a little, and then grew still again, whilst the tears rose to her eyes, and all her heart was flooded with memories of her dear dead, and all her soul trembled beneath those majestic strains.

And when the March was ended her cousin turned, and saw her.

"Finella! Poor child, I have made you unhappy!" and he began painfully to lower himself from his seat; but she ran to him.

"Not unhappy, dear cousin! only—only some memories are so painful, although we would scarcely forget if we could. And, oh! what a pleasure you have given me! How could you listen to my poor playing last night?"

And whilst she talked she skilfully assisted him in his movements; and, with tears yet wet upon her cheeks, smiled at him so frankly and so kindly that he half forgot his terrible affliction.

And, after breakfast, which she made bright for him, she said, abruptly,—

"Cousin, you must understand, please, I have not been accustomed to an idle life. Is there nothing I can do to help you?"

"Run over the list of your accomplishments," he said, with his faint, slow smile. Remember, I am not acquainted with them yet."

"I don't think I have any," humbly; "but I can write very legibly, and papa always said I was capital at accounts."

"Don't go any further, Finella, your work is found. Why, my scribbling puzzles even me at times. And, as for accounts, if Rae (my steward) were not honest, he could cheat me every day of his life. If it will not bore you, you shall be my little secretary and accountant."

She was delighted, and told him so, and would have begun her new duties at once; but this he utterly forbade, saying she must have one whole day's holiday, and begging to know how she wished to spend these few idle hours.

She looked at him meditatively a moment, then said,—

"I should like to drive through these lovely lanes. I should like to know my father's country well."

"So you shall. I'll order out the carriage, and Kemp shall go with you."

She had half risen, but now she sat down, again, and all the brightness had left her face.

"Well, why that disappointed look?" Eustace asked.

"I do not wish to go now, thank you," she answered quietly.

"Aren't you a trifle capricious?" smiling kindly. "Just a moment since you were all eagerness to go."

"I thought you would be my companion," she said in a very low voice.

The pale handsome face flushed dusky.

"I rarely venture out," he said after a painful pause; "my deformity makes me sensitive to even kindly notice, and pity from some folks is worse than scorn."

"Don't you think," the girl said gently, "that folks love you for yourself, your kindly words and kindly deeds, rather than for beauty of form and face? If not, how many of us would be starved of love through all our lives? But we will not go out unless into the gardens—they are very beautiful."

A moment the hunchback wrestled with himself, his dread of criticism, his love of solitude. Then he said,—

"You shall not be cheated of your drive, and probably your opinion is more unbiased than mine. Run away and dress; I shall be ready soon."

"But will it pain you cousin?"

"No, child, no;" and the smile he gave her seemed to confirm his words.

The servants could scarcely believe the evidence of their own senses when Sir

Eustace, leaning on his cousin's arm, went down the broad steps and entered the carriage.

"Wonders will never cease," said Hyde, the butler, "and never have I seen Sir Eustace look so bright."

"It's Miss Finella's doing, and I think she'll prove a real blessing to him," said Kemp. "She's not beautiful in face, but if ever a lovely soul looked out of eyes there's one looks through hers. Did you notice how careful she is to let him do little things for her, so that he shall not always be reminded of his affliction, poor dear?"

And so, while the domestics discussed them, the cousins drove through green and shady ways; and Finella was so full of artless interest in all she said that Eustace scarcely noticed the curious or pitying glances of the few people they met.

Then she must know the reason why such a lovely place as her cousin's home should be called The Folly, and he told her how, seven generations back, a certain Sir Geoffrey Gray had caused the old homestead to be destroyed, and lavished all his fortune in building the new; and when it was finished he had not the wherewithal to inhabit it or maintain any state.

So he let the stately mansion, and wandered many years from place to place, returning at last in triumph, having married a great heiress, whose fortune restored the old family to its former grandeur.

After this the carriage was brought to the door every morning, and people soon grew too much accustomed to seeing the cousins to pay much attention to them, and only said, amongst themselves, how much brighter Sir Eustace looked.

He wished Finella to ride, but this she refused to do, knowing that he could not share her pleasure.

And so the drives were continued, and she wrote his letters, balanced his accounts; whilst he, in return, became her music-master, and taught her many things from the rich stores of his knowledge.

He had never been so happy; he did not stay to question why. He only knew that this young, innocent girl cared for him for his own sake, and not for the gifts and guerdons he lavished upon her; and her simple faith in "Cousin Eustace" was inexpressibly pleasant to him.

But the homely *tête-à-tête* life was to be broken up. Returning home one morning they were accosted by Mrs. Kemp, who said, tartly,—

"If you please, Sir Eustace, Mr. Alden has arrived. He had some letters to write, and so went to the study."

"Alden! Oh, that is good hearing," said Eustace, his whole face beaming with pleasure. "Come and be introduced, Finella. I daresay he is anxious to know you after all I have said about you;" but the girl, remembering Kemp's words, hung back. "You are as shy as a child," her cousin continued. "Alden isn't an ogre—like me—and I want you to be good friends."

And when he put out his hand she could no longer hold out against him, but walked beside him, keeping pace with his slow and painful steps.

As they entered the study a tall, handsome man, of somewhat foreign appearance, rose hastily, and seizing the hunchback's hand in an almost fierce grip, exclaimed,—

"My dear fellow, what a treat it is to see you again, and how well you look."

"You must thank our cousin for that," said Eustace, with a smile. "She has worked wonders. Finella, this is Alden Gray, and as he is a host in himself, you will not want for amusement whilst he remains with us."

The bold dark eyes glanced indifferently

at the pale face; then Alden, stooping, lightly touched the girl's brow with his lips, and Eustace wondered why such a pang of fear assailed him.

"I am glad to meet you, little cousin," Alden said, in a suave and insincere voice. "You seem to have had a very salutary effect on Eustace. And how do you like your new surroundings?"

"Very much, thank you," stily, and Eustace, in secret, deplored her manner.

She was always so kindly to him, why should she think it necessary to treat Alden coldly?

"I forgot," he thought later on, "my miserable deformity makes me unlike other men. She has no fear I shall misconstrue her kindness." And the dark eyes followed her sadly, as she escaped from the room.

"She is rather *gauché*," said Alden, coolly, "and very plain."

"You must know her to appreciate her. I cannot tell you half her merits, half her goodness. She has no need of beauty; and it is only her extreme shyness that makes her appear awkward now and then."

The other shot a keen glance at him.

"She has a very warm partisan in you; but then you are always generous. I suppose Finella is quite dependent upon you?"

"If you like to put it that way—yes," reluctantly. "Poor Uncle Courtenay's life was an utter failure. But you must not suppose Finella is a fine idle lady. She does the work of two secretaries, and is, besides, the best of nurses, the most charming of companions. I should be lost without her now."

"Then I am thankful indeed, for your sake, that fate brought her here, and am quite prepared to play the loyal knight," and then he turned the conversation adroitly into another channel.

He did not see Finella again until the evening, when he came upon her at the head of the staircase.

"You are going down, little cousin?" he asked, in a cordial tone.

"Not yet, Mr. Gray. I am waiting for Eustace. It is my pleasure to help him down every evening—the stairs try him so sadly."

"Then I will keep you company; but do you know you have committed a very grave error?"

"I?" And the lovely eyes, slightly startled, were lifted to his.

"Yes; I, too, am your cousin. Why should you treat me as a stranger? Surely it may be Alden and Finella between us?" She blushed, but looked relieved.

"Oh, is that all?" naively. "I was afraid I had done something very wrong."

He smiled encouragingly.

"Well, it is to be Alden?"

"Oh, no; at least not yet—when you are so much a stranger to me. Why, I did not even know of your existence until Eustace spoke of you."

"No," bitterly. "I don't suppose my relatives are so proud of me that they publish my birth to the four winds. I am fortune's scapegoat."

"You are happier far than many who have wealth," she answered with grave rebuke. "You are strong, and—and erect."

"Yes, and I ought to be ashamed of my foolish complainings. Well, Finella, I won't urge you to call me Alden until you know me better; but suppose we effect a compromise, and in future you address me as 'cousin'?" Ah! here comes Eustace," as a door close by opened.

Finella went forward quickly, and gave her arm to her cousin.

"This fresh arrival has not made you forget me," he said, lightly, "and (with a pleasant smile at Alden) there never was

such a thoughtful little soul as our Finella."

Then they all went downstairs, Alden in the rear, and his face was not good to see.

"The artful little minx," he thought. "She means marrying the hunchback, and he's quite ready to fall into her snare. But, by Jove, I'll cut him out! To think such a mass of deformity should own this place and draw its revenues, whilst I—I—his superior in all beside, have to vegetate on the wretched allowance he makes me."

His gloomy eyes followed Finella persistently.

"She looks almost pretty to-night," he thought. "Perhaps something might be made of her, after all. Jove! She's got good eyes, and is playing them upon Sir Humpty-Dumpty to a purpose."

Finella was certainly at her best. She wore a gown of soft clinging white, with bows of black velvet ribbon—this was Sir Eustace's latest gift. The white throat was encircled by a narrow band of velvet braid, decorated with a tiny pearl brooch; and the wonderful brown hair was most artistically dressed.

She looked so fair and youthful, and yet at that moment Alden hated her, because it seemed to him that she stood in the way to his succession.

He argued that Eustace would "never make old bones," and the estates, not being entailed, could be willed to any one he chose.

It did not allay his anger to see the care with which Finella conducted his host to his chair, or the loving anxiety with which she ministered to his needs.

"She is a dangerous rival," he thought, "but I'm not afraid of her. If I can't have the estates without her, why, I'll make her Mrs. Alden," and he never doubted his own powers of fascination.

When she retired to the drawing-room, and Eustace seemed wishful to follow, he said,—

"Let us go, too, old boy. It is lonely for the little cousin; and for your sake I want to cultivate her."

So they went, and found Finella playing soft snatches of songs; but she left the piano when they entered, and could not be induced to return to it.

"Very well, we will talk," said Eustace, "and really, I have some news for you both. To-morrow—now, Finella, don't open your eyes in dismay—to-morrow our party will be augmented."

"Oh!" said Finella, with such an air of distress that Alden laughed.

"By how many?" he asked, when he had recovered his composure.

"Only one; so we shall be quite a comfortable number. You remember Robin Adair, Alden? Well, he has promised to spend the month of his hard-earned rest with us."

"And who is Robin Adair?" asked Finella, wondering at the sudden gloom of Alden's face; but before she had quite recovered the start he had given her he moved to her side and said gaily,—

"You must let me tell you. Eustace would never do justice to the subject. He is a *protégé* of our kind cousin, a penniless young fellow, without a friend in the world save Eustace, and having a pretty taste in sculpture, is learning the art—at our cousin's expense—and being of a very grateful nature, takes every available opportunity of visiting his patron."

"Thank you!" said Finella, coldly, being in some indescribable way offended by Alden's apparently innocent speech.

CHAPTER III.

"MISS FINELLA, I believe?" said the frankest of voices, and she saw herself con-

fronted by a young fellow who might, indeed, have been the hero of the sweet old song called by his name.

Tall and broad shouldered, standing, like Saul of old, "a head and shoulders" above his fellows, fair of face, with an open brow, candid blue eyes, and a firm, yet kindly mouth, slightly shadowed by a slight yellow moustache.

"Miss Finella, I believe, and I must thank you for the great change you have worked in Sir Eustace!"

Whatever she might have been with Alden, she was neither shy nor cold with him. As frankly as he offered his hand she tendered hers.

"If you are a friend of my cousin's I am glad to see you. Where is Sir Eustace? Has he left you long?"

"Not more than twenty minutes. He is talking business with Mr. Gray and his solicitor. I fancy the former is in difficulties again."

"Oh!" Then, after a pause, "Do you think he is ever out of them?"

Robin Adair laughed at her pointed remark, then said,—

"I am afraid not, and, worse still, I am afraid he never will do better until Sir Eustace stops the supplies."

"I dislike him," Finella said, half-scared at her boldness. "He is not a good man, and he does not love or honour his cousin as he should. Oh, Mr. Adair, he and I owe everything to his generosity."

"And I too. I wish I could find some way in which to show my gratitude. To think of repaying such great goodness is folly; but I would like to prove conclusively that I love and reverence him beyond all others, that there is nothing I would hesitate to do for him."

The frank, earnest young face was all aglow, the bright eyes alight with enthusiasm, and, impulsively, Finella stretched out her hand to him.

"We shall be friends," she said, very simply. "I am glad to know you, Mr. Adair;" and at that moment Alden entered.

"The young rascal is making hay whilst the sun shines," he thought. "If I am not careful I shall lose my chance;" and then he advanced smilingly.

"Welcome, Adair," he said, in an odiously patronising tone, "delighted to see you; and how are your studies progressing? You've had a gay time at Rome, I suppose?"

"I went to work, and not to play!" Robin retorted, bluntly.

"Just so; we all say that when we're on our trial. Finella, aren't you delighted to meet that almost fabulous creature—the diligent student?"

"I see no reason to doubt Mr. Adair's statement," coldly. "You know there are some who really make the most of their chances;" and with that little shaft she was turning away when Robin stayed her.

"For pity's sake don't leave us alone together, Miss Gray. We're sure to disagree, we always do. You see we hold such contrary opinions."

"He is such a boy yet," remarked Alden, laughingly, "that he naturally thinks he is going to convert us all to his own ideas, and rides rough when he finds he has undertaken an impossible task."

"I will stay," Finella said, and frowned a little as she seated herself before a window. "But—but—you must forgive me when I say I think you two ought to avoid hostilities whilst at The Folly for the sake of Eustace."

"Hostilities! Surely, Finella, you did not so contrive our bantering?" said the one man. "Miss Gray, you're right," said the other. "We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, and I am."

"Then I am not," retorted Alden, savagely. "My conscience is clear," and he strode from the room in high dudgeon, Robin's laughter echoing in his ears.

"If he were not a villain he would be very funny," he said to his companion. "But how distressed you look! Oh, I say, you must not believe all the rash things I say. I am so prone to speak on the impulse of the moment, and to regret my words afterwards. But now let us forget all unpleasantness. I have something to show you if you will only come with me to what Sir Eustace is pleased to call my studio."

"I will come."

"But you must promise strict secrecy first. I can only take you there on condition that you divulge nothing you see or hear."

She began to laugh.

"Do you belong to a Nihilist society, Mr. Adair? If so, I decline to accompany you. I have a wholesome and thoroughly genuine horror of dynamite and infernal machines."

"Oh, you're not going to see anything so dreadful as that. This way, please. Isn't this a jolly corridor, so spacious and airy? And this is my studio. You see I keep it locked up," and producing a key, he bade her enter.

There was very little to be seen she concluded at first sight, but then her attention was fixed upon a drawn curtain which veiled one small nook.

"Your work lies behind that," she said, and smiling, he drew it back. "Look!" and at his command she lifted her eyes, and gave a little cry of astonishment. "I have done it from memory," he went on, hurriedly. "Tell me, is it worthy of acceptance? Is it like?"

"It is very beautiful! Mr. Adair. What genius you have! May I touch it? And, if you please, is it a gift to Sir Eustace?"

"Touch it, yes. I may trust you. It will be finished in a day or two, and I hope he will like it. I have laboured to give him pleasure, and if I have done so I am satisfied."

Finella stood silent, looking earnestly at the sad, sweet face before her. It was the exact presentment of Sir Eustace, but Robin had been careful only to reproduce the head and the splendid, column-like throat. He, like Finella, would vain have the hunchback forget his calamity.

"How proud and glad he will be! Can't you imagine his surprise and delight?" she asked, turning her flushed, bright face towards the young fellow. "Oh, you must make haste to finish it, although I would not have you spoil your work by hurry. And now what are you going to do with yourself?"

"I shall obey you and work until luncheon," he said, smiling in a friendly fashion down at the small, gentle face, "and after luncheon I am still at your service, Miss Finella."

"You are very kind; and now as you intend staying here I must run away. There are heaps of unfinished letters and accounts waiting for me, and so good-bye for the present."

"A dear little soul!" mused Robin, as the door closed upon her. "Just the right sort of companion for Sir Eustace," and then he forgot her in the growing interest of his work, for Finella was not one to take the heart by storm.

But when they met at luncheon, and he saw her devotion to his patron, the hundred-and-one pretty wiles by which she amused him, and lured him to forgetfulness of his condition, he blessed her with all his honest heart, and found himself unconsciously watching her every movement, listening for the sound of her fresh, young voice, the low ripple of her pleasant laughter.

"Miss Finella is making the running," Alden said to him that evening. "She is first favourite now—we're nowhere, my boy."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, with a touch of hauteur.

"This," coolly, "that from this date your visits and mine here will depend upon her pleasure. She will do what she purposes, and you may bet your bottom dollar she will very soon take her place as Lady Gray—my cousin's wife!"

"What!" cried Robin, "Oh! this jest is too unseemly! Sir Eustace will never marry. Heaven help him—it would be a sin to do so, and he is so unselfish he would never seek to bind so young and bright a life to his."

"That proves how small your knowledge is of human nature. Why, man, he hates her to exchange so much as a word with us; and she (although of course she doesn't care a fig for him) is quite willing to pander to his jealousy."

"I won't hear you, I won't believe one word of this, and we ought to be horse-whipped for discussing our host and benefactor in such a fashion."

Alden shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will; and now, suppose we join my cousins—you'll have an opportunity of judging for yourself; and pray, understand. I intend no disparagement of Miss Finella; on the contrary, I am far too likely to grow inconveniently fond of her, so you must make allowance for the vagaries of a jealous man. Come along."

Outside the drawing room they halted, and the sound of Finella's sweet voice came to them as she sang.

"You ought to feel flattered," said Alden, with a savage sneer, and pushing wide the door entered. "I've been telling Adair he does not half appreciate the compliment paid him by your pretty song, Finella."

She rose from the piano, flushed, confused, and not a little angry, but it was Sir Eustace who answered the coarse sally.

"Finella was singing at my request. I like the old song, and I like to think the hero was after this boy's stamp, and not nearly so much to blame as the heroine thinks. Come here, Alden, I want to talk business, and those two youngsters may amuse themselves as best they can. But first, if you please, wheel me to the east window."

"That is my duty," Finella said, promptly, and refusing to resign it, pushed him gently towards his favourite place. Then she joined Robin at the piano.

"Now," said Eustace, when Robin's voice deadened the sound of his, "now that they are engrossed with their music, tell me what ails you, Alden; you are not yourself. Are your difficulties greater than you confess?"

"No, cousin, thanks to you; but a change has come over me, and I am like one bewitched." Then, after a pause, "What a little angel Finella is! You are a man to be envied having such a companion."

There was a short silence, and try as he would, Alden could not see the other's face in the semi-twilight in which they sat. Then Eustace spoke, and his voice was more weary, more wistful than ever it had been.

"You surely do not imply that she is the cause of your moodiness and abstraction?"

"Yes, I do. I've known her only a few hours, but if I stay here long I shall lose myself to her entirely. Can I be blind to the beauty of her disposition, her utter self-forgetfulness?"

Silence again; then Sir Eustace said, quite calmly,—

"Do you wish me to understand that you would be proud and glad to call her wife? That if she can be won you would fain win her?"

"I am a presumptuous fool," the other answered, with such apparent emotion that the hunchback put out his hand to him. "How dare I think of wooing or wedding? I who never yet have got a brief, and, but for the generosity of my one friend, might go to the dogs or starve for aught anyone else cared."

"This is very sudden, and I would have you well examine your own heart. But, if it should be so—if after further consideration, further knowledge of—of her, you still wish this thing, remember, I shall not oppose you. I am not likely to live long, and I should like to see her settled before I go. And, until then, your home and hers would be here, dear Alden; but, understand, she is the sole arbiter of my fate."

Then that arch hypocrite took the slim, weak hand, and half crushed it in his cruel grasp, whilst he poured out a torrent of thanks in a low voice, but Eustace did not answer.

Presently the lights were brought in, and with one swift glance Finella saw all was not well with her guardian.

Crossing rapidly to him, she said,—

"You have been worrying him with business matter, Mr. Alden, and he has not been well all day. Dear cousin, let me lead you to your room."

Without a word he rose, and Robin, startled by his extreme pallor, placed himself on the other side, saying,—

"Lean on me, Sir Eustace," and so they led him away, Alden scowling savagely upon their retreating forms.

On the landing Finella paused.

"Good night, dear cousin! May you wake refreshed and strengthened!" and then she lifted her face in all simplicity, and kissed him very gently, not knowing how she stabbed his heart by that calm, affectionate caress; and, having watched him until the door closed behind him, said, "Mr. Adair, will you please make my apologies to Mr. Gray? I shall not go down again to-night," and then she, too, went to her apartments.

All that night Sir Eustace lay in agonising thought.

He had been long in learning the truth, but at last it had overtaken him.

His cousin's words had shown him all his heart, and he knew now that Finella was dearer to him than all the world beside; that he, to whom love was denied, had yet dared to love; that he, deformed, sick, and feeble, "smitten of God," had forgotten everything but this one thing—she was near him, and she was kind!

He knew marriage was not for him—he never for a moment contemplated it—and he had believed himself incapable of "lover's love," and so had drifted into this great sorrow.

With a groan he turned upon his sleepless bed.

"Heaven knows it was hard enough before, but now—oh, how shall I bear it? She must never know, it would break her tender heart!" And then, again, "If only I were as other men! If only! Oh, Finella! my Finella a little longer yet—what shall I do without you? How can I bear to see your growing love for another than myself? Heaven let me die, away and out of it all!"

And so through the long night he tortured his poor heart; but with the morning there came fresh strength, fresh courage, and when he met Finella his pale face was as cheerful and his eyes, as kindly as she had ever known them; only, to her distress, she saw very little of him in the days imme-

diately following, and Alden was her constant shadow.

She disliked and distrusted him, and yet was silent, lest she should grieve the dear friend and cousin whose peace and happiness were so precious to her.

Robin came always to her relief, and a pleasant understanding existed between them, which the young fellow was at some pains to improve.

A few days after his arrival at Gray's Folly, happening to find her alone, he said,—

"Miss Finella, will you come to the studio? I want your opinion upon my work."

"Is it really finished?" she asked, eagerly. "Oh, how anxious I have been to hear about it, only I have never had an opportunity to question you about it."

"No, you are always engrossed with Mr. Gray. Miss Finella, do you mean to marry him?"

She opened her eyes wide upon him.

"Marry him! no, oh, no! One would not marry a man one disliked and despised! Please say no more on the subject. It—it hurts me that you should think so poorly of me!"

"Forgive me!" he began, penitently, but she would not hear him.

"Let us go to the studio; and then, if you will let me, I will bring Sir Eustace there? I would like you to show it him first, when none but you and I are present," and he led her off in triumph.

"It is perfection!" she said, when she had looked long and silently at the magnificent head, the sorrowful, wonderful face. "You must love him very dearly to have caught his look like this!"

"My love for him is like your own," quickly, "and this mutual feeling should be a bond between us."

"Yes," she answered, innocently, "he has made us friends. And now you must let me fetch him; I cannot wait another moment," so she tripped out of the studio, down to the pleasant breakfast-room, where she found Eustace. Dancing up to him, her face all bright with smiles, she laid her hands lightly upon his shoulders.

"You must come with me, cousin; I have the loveliest surprise for you," and obedient to her lightest wish he went with her, wondering a little. And when he saw Robin's work and caught the loving gratitude of his look his whole face changed.

"My dear boy! how shall I thank you? Did I not prophesy you were a genius? What can I say to make you understand my pleasure?"

"Say nothing, Sir Eustace, but only accept it as a token of my grateful affection," as he grasped the extended hand warmly.

"And, cousin, it must have a place of honour in your study," said Finella, before Eustace could reply. "And when I am idle it shall look down rebukefully upon me; when I am good it shall smile approval." And with that she laid her cool, young cheek to his, and could not guess how cruel was her kindness. But young Robin saw and understood at last, and all his heart ached for his generous patron.

CHAPTER IV.

"EUSTACE, I regret to say important business takes me to town, and I may be absent some weeks. Before I go I would like to speak to Finella."

"Is not this rather premature?" asked the other, steadily. "Do you think she has shown you any sign of favour?"

"I am afraid I cannot say that; but you know how coy she is; you know, too, what a jealous fellow I am; and I am haunted by

the thought that when I am away that handsome Adair may teach her to forget me. They are much together."

"Yes, but I did not regard him in the light of a suitor, although you understand, should he propose and be accepted, I should raise no objection to the alliance. In everything Finella's happiness is to be considered; but you have my permission to speak. She is now alone in the study; put your fate to the test."

"A thousand thanks. You are more good to me than I deserve; and if Finella will listen to me it shall be the labour of our lives to make yours joyous." And then he went away to find the girl; and Sir Eustace, leaning back in his chair, groaned in the bitterness of his spirit.

"Heaven is very cruel," he said. "Why should I suffer so long, so long? When will the end, the blessed end, come to me. Oh! how weary I am of it all—sick to the heart, sick to the heart!"

He looked back through the long years of his sad life, and he saw himself again a child—a helpless child—on whom gentle women showered compassionate kisses, and not a few tears.

He could never share in boyish sports; he could never attend one of our great public schools; his tutor and Kemp were the only people with whom he held unrestricted intercourse.

His father he rarely saw, for Sir Ethelbert was angry that his son should be so weak and deformed a creature, and regarded him with cold disfavour. He was a hard man, and when he died his son could not grieve over his loss.

How terribly lonely his life was! How bitter to feel himself an alien to his kindred—a helpless cripple, dependant for care and attention upon his hirelings.

It was with a sense of joy he welcomed Finella's coming, and now—

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried, "better I had never seen her, my darling! my darling, who can never be mine! Sorrow has been my meat day and night; bitterness of soul and unrest. Would I were out of it all, lapped in blessed unconsciousness."

Meanwhile, Alden had sought and found Finella. She looked up quickly as he entered.

"I am very busy," she said, "but if there is anything I can do for you I can spare you five minutes," and she rose as she spoke.

"You are chary with your favours," he answered, chafing under her coldness, "but I will not keep you long. Finella, I'm going away."

"Oh!"

"The monosyllable had certainly an air of relief in it, but he was obstinately deaf to this."

"Shall you be absent long?"

"That depends upon you."

"Upon me! Oh no. Your actions are not subject to my control."

"Then with all my heart I wish they were, Finella, my darling, won't you make my life your care? Won't you tell me you will love me a little, because I love you so much?"

She shrank back from him.

"Hush! hush! You should not jest so shamelessly with me!" she cried, in hot indignation. "Why, there have been times when I have felt you have hated me."

"All along you have misjudged and misunderstood me," he answered, sorrowfully.

"Why are you so hard on me? Dear, cannot you give me some word of hope and cheer? Will you condemn me to a life of loneliness and sadness?"

The clear eyes met his bravely; there was no blush on the pale cheeks.

"If this is true, Mr. Gray, I am sorry,

and hope you will forget your fancy soon. I am not fitted to be your wife; I could never shine in your set."

"You shall lead what sort of life you like if you will only say yes; and Eustace has promised to do much for us. If we choose this house may be our home."

"Sir Eustace! Does he know of this—and approve?" she asked, startled and trembling. "Have you spoken to him?"

"I have but just come from him, and it is his dearest wish to see you my wife. He feels his hold upon life so frail and uncertain that he would have you settled, and quickly."

The pale young face was paler yet. She loved Eustace so dearly, she owed him so much, how could she go against his wishes? But then, how could she marry a man she so disliked and distrusted?

Would it not be a sin to promise love, honour, and obedience, knowing in her heart she could give none of these things?

And then the sweet simplicity of her nature, the deep-rooted honesty which had marked her conduct all through life, stood her in good stead. She would go to Eustace herself.

"Cousin Alden, you have taken me by surprise, and I cannot answer you yet. This is a grave question, and I must have advice. Give me until to-morrow, and then you shall have my answer."

"If you loved me you would give yourself to me without this reservation; but I do not complain. Until to-morrow I will remain here, but do not prolong my suspense unnecessarily. It is very hard to bear."

"To-morrow you shall have my reply. Until then do not trouble me. I—I am bewildered. I did not expect this," and thanking her for her goodness, he left her, with a satisfied smile on his face.

"She will do anything for Eustace, especially as she knows marriage with me will mean no change in her prosperity, and she is so simple in most things. I shall quickly model her after my own ideal. Pity she's so confoundingly plain."

Left to herself, Finella stood a moment bewildered and dismayed; then, with a childlike trust in Eustace's wisdom, she hastened to him, meeting Robin on her way.

"What a hurry you are in?" he said, and she answered,—

"Do not stop me. I—I have business with my cousin," and he let her pass; and in a moment she was with Sir Eustace.

He looked up as she entered, afraid to hear what she had to tell. And his heart was like lead in his breast as she went quickly forward, and kneeling beside him, with her face down-dropped, put an arm about his neck as innocently and affectionately as a child might have done.

"Cousin Eustace, tell me truly, do you wish this thing?" And he asked her steadily,—

"What thing do you mean?"

"That—that I should marry Mr. Gray. He said it would please you, and I—I—"

"Will you! Go on, Finella, I am listening."

"I would do anything to please you. But—but ought I to marry a man I do not love, even to prove how grateful I am to you?"

His heart gave a great bound.

"And you do not love Alden?"

"No, no, no!" vehemently. "I do not even like him."

"Then the whole case is very clear. You must not marry him. Poor Alden, what a blow it will be for him."

"He will soon forget it," confidently, and then she laid her fresh, young cheek to his, and wondered that he shivered, and did not guess what anguish she inflicted. "Never send me away from you," she pleaded,

"never, dear Eustace. I am so happy here."

"But the day will come when you will wish to leave The Folly."

"Oh, no!" and now the innocent, smiling face was lifted to his. "I do not wish to change my state. I never can love any one so well as you." And he groaned in bitterness of spirit.

He looked so ill, so white, that she was full of sweet compassion.

"You are having one of your bad times," she said.

"No; it was only a passing pang; it is gone now. Finella, do you understand how great a blow you are inflicting upon Alden!"

"No," she answered promptly. "Since I have been with you I see clearer than I did when with him. He does not care a little bit for me, and I can't tell why he wants to marry me."

"Child, you are unjust."

But for once she clung to her own opinion with a tenacity that surprised him and grieved the hunchback.

"I cannot convince you, dear, how groundless are your suspicions of Alden, and so we will consider the matter closed. Now, how are you going to acquaint him with the decision?"

"Are you too angry with me to tell him all the truth?" wistfully.

"I am not angry, and I will do anything you ask."

"And—and—if I may, I will keep my room until he is gone," and then she lightly touched his brow with her fresh, young lips.

Ah, that kindly kiss! What a knell it would have been to any hopes he might have dared nurse! What a cold, poor substitute for the kiss of love that never should be his! In these last few days he had lived a life of martyrdom, and it was being proved once more (in his case) that the "world hath more of martyr life than martyr death."

But, thank Heaven, she was spared to him a little longer yet; and, perhaps, before she learned the great lesson of love, he would be unconscious of it all—dead to all that had ever liked him or perplexed him.

He did not see Alden for some hours, but when they met there was a confident look upon his face, an exultant light in his eyes, that made Eustace's task the harder.

"Ah, yes! Of course the little one has told you all; in fact, she left me to do so. I have your congratulations, I hope."

"Say rather my condolence, Alden, dear old fellow. I am very sorry. Finella does not care for you in the way you wish." And then for once in his life, the other was thrown off his guard.

"It is a lie! an infernal lie! It is you who have come between us. The girl would have listened to me but for you. And you hope to marry her yourself?"

"Heaven forbid that I should dare so much," Eustace said, quickly; but Alden was now so blind with passion as to care nothing for what he said. "She has befooled and bewitched you, the artful little minx, until you think her perfection. But do you suppose for a moment any woman would marry such a misshapen, feeble creature as you but for your possessions?"

And then he could have bitten his tongue out for uttering such wild and wicked words, not because of their wild wickedness, but because he knew that he had shaken his cousin's love for and trust in him to the very foundations.

Sir Eustace rose, white and stern, with a sad dignity about his poor figure that would have touched a tender heart to tears.

"No man shall speak alightingly of her in my presence. She has been as an angel in this house; and surely you, of all the world,

should know me better than to dream I would link such a bright young life to my own wretched one."

"That be hanged for a tale," Alden said, coarsely; and now he believed his cause with Eustace utterly ruined, he did not stay to choose his words. "You only lack courage to propose to the girl, and she can't very well do so herself; so how you will settle the matter I'm at a loss to know. I suppose you won't employ me as ambassador?"

"Leave the house!" cried Eustace, all his blood on fire, and just for one blessed moment forgetful of his infirmity. "Leave the house, or by Heaven I'll make you!"

"You!" began Alden, with a wicked snarl, when Robin hurriedly entered the room.

"I heard high voices. Forgive me, Sir Eustace."

And, without more ado, he put forth his herculean strength to thrust the other out.

Alden was neither a coward nor puny, and he made a short, sharp effort to be free; but Robin was too strong for him, and in a fury of anger he saw a slim figure flit by him to that helpless, shaken creature in the low chair.

He saw a white arm steal about his throat, and the innocent, brave young face turned loathingly upon him; heard a sweet, young voice say,—

"God! you have wounded him sorely, and I will never forgive you!"

Then he went out, and by night was in town, and cursing his own vile temper for the ruin it had wrought.

But in a day or two, when funds were getting low, and his temper was well under control, he wrote imploring pardon, confessing, with sorrow, that on the day of his explosion he had been drinking freely, and that he could remember nothing of what had passed save his summary dismissal, which he must have richly deserved; and concluded by praying "his dear cousin" to forget and forgive.

The latter Sir Eustace freely did, but he could not so easily forget, and never any more would Alden enjoy his perfect love and trust.

But he was so fully aware of his cousin's impecuniosity, and of such a generous nature, that he even meditated sending for him, and bidding him once more take up his residence at The Folly until such a time as it should be his by right.

He broached the subject to Finella, and then, for the first and last time in his life, he found her hard and unforgiving.

"Of course, cousin," she said, "you will please yourself; but if Mr. Gray returns I must beg you to let me go away."

"Why? Does the idea of meeting him cause you embarrassment?"

"Most distinctly, no!" and now she was really angry; "but after his scandalous words to you I will never treat him as other than an enemy. I hate him. I shall never forgive him!"

"This is not like you, child."

"Yes, it is; it is the bad part of me come uppermost; and the worst of it is, I would not feel different if I could. But let me go away, I can earn my own bread, and it is not well that I should come between you and Mr. Gray. You love him as a brother, and I am such a poor, stupid creature. I cannot talk to you and amuse you as he does. Dear cousin, I have been very happy here, but now the time has come for me to leave you."

And then, to his distress, she burst into bitter sobs and tears. With a great effort he kept back the words he would fain have spoken, and said, authoritatively,—

"Come to me, Finella," and, like a child, she obeyed. "Do you know you are distressing yourself (and me) most unnecessarily? That although I hold Alden very dear you are dearer still—my own little nurse, companion, sister? and that you never shall leave me save for your husband's home? And as you feel you cannot meet Alden yet I will not ask him to return."

Then he paused; but she was so shaken with grief for him, and anger against Alden, that she could not yet control her voice sufficiently to speak; and the cripple remained silent, gently smoothing her hair, and fighting with the passionate love consuming him. And after awhile she, lifting sweet, wet eyes to his, asked,—

"Is it true I am dearer to you than Alden that you really wish me to stay with you?"

"It is quite true, my child. You are a dear and sacred trust to me; and because this is so, because you know I would do anything for you, you will try to please me in one thing."

"You mean I must try to forgive Mr. Gray," she asked, in a low voice. "Well, I promise to try, but I can't guarantee success," and then she looked half saucily into his face. "You ought to be glad, and not sorry, that I hate your enemies, that I make your cause mine."

"But Alden is not my enemy; and you forget that men often say words they bitterly regret, whilst labouring under a great disappointment—a great sorrow."

But Finella was not convinced. On the contrary, a very resolute (not to say obstinate) look gave a new character to her face. And then, seeing the pain she gave Eustace, her mood changed suddenly, and she was her usual sweet, caressing self.

But he could bear no further torture today, and, pleading fatigue, sent her to join Robin in the breakfast-room. He looked up quickly as she entered.

"Miss Finella, cannot you spare me an hour or two? This is my last day here."

"Oh, I am sorry! We have had such pleasant times," she said.

"Yes, the place is like Heaven now Gray has gone. I wish he had never come. But we won't talk of him to-day; I want you to be in your very kindest mood, and take me to the 'Devil's Punchbowl.'"

"It is a horrid spot," said Finella, "and there are adders to be found. It was the scene of a murder, too—"

"I am not to be frightened," the young man answered, laughing.

"You haven't heard all the truth. It is five miles away, and the road is dreadfully rough. You don't expect me to walk ten miles in one day? But we can drive there if you like."

"Not if I know it. I should not talk freely, with servants in hearing. Never mind, I forego the Punchbowl, but not a walk. Will you be long dressing?"

"Wait and see," smiling at his air of authority; and she ran lightly upstairs to return in a short while ready for the walk.

"How quick you have been, Miss Finella!"

"Why not? I incline to the belief that until we met you knew only fashionable ladies."

"The saints forbid! I have no patience with their jargon and their graces; and if I had I don't suppose they would think of a struggling sculptor. Where are we going?"

"Through the park first; after that anywhere you will."

"Is it too late in the season for you to enter the woods?"

"Not at all, and I like the moist rich scent of the dying leaves. Ah! What a

lovely day it is. What a pity to think the winter will be with us so soon."

"And I shall see you no more before the summer, Miss Finella. I have something to say to you; and when she looked at him she grew pale and trembled a little, for she knew by instinct what he had to tell."

CHAPTER V.

"I AM not bold enough to hope you regard me yet with any warmer feeling than friendship," he said, quickly and unsteadily; "but I cannot go without telling you how dear, how very dear, you are to me, and begging you to give a thought now and then to one whose whole life's happiness lies in your hands."

"Mr. Adair!"

"No, you must not speak yet. My words do not come so readily as I wish, and all my ideas are scattered; yet let me tell you, as well as I can, something of what lies in my heart. I love you with all my strength."

"I did not think, I did not guess," she began, when he hastily interrupted her.

"How should you, when I myself did not know the truth until I learned Alden Gray was a suitor for your hand? Then the mad jealousy and pain possessing me showed me my own heart. My dear, I am poor and struggling yet; and if by any blessed chance you could grow to love me, I could not make a home for you for at least two or three years. You see I am frank with you. You shall never accuse me of deceit, Finella. Will you say to me—hope?"

"I cannot. At least, not now—not yet; when the thought of your love is so new as almost to frighten me. I like you very, very much—more than anyone except Sir Eustace."

"And there is no one in Australia who has any claim to you?"

"No, oh no!" almost smiling at the thought, "no one."

And then the young man took her little hands, and held them tenderly in his own, whilst he asked, gravely,—

"And are you quite sure the regard you have for your cousin is not of a warmer nature than friendship?"

She looked at him in shocked surprise.

"Could you dream that? Do you believe I could love him in such a way, and yet dare to caress him, to treat him so familiarly? Oh, poor Eustace! Is he not set outside the pale of lover's love? No, Mr. Adair, I pity him. I would almost die, I think, to win him happiness. He has done so much for me, has been so good. And I think I almost worship him! You should know better than to dream such foolish dreams."

"I am glad they are foolish," Robin answered gently and gravely still; "and being so, I will take courage to hope. Finella, make me a promise. If, whilst I am away, you should meet and learn to love some other man, will you write me so; that in that hour I may know my hopes are vain, and that nothing remains for me but to be your loyal and steadfast friend?"

"It is very little you ask," she said, "and I cannot refuse. Let it be as you will."

"And should I hear nothing from you before next June, you do not forbid me to come to the Folly—in the hope—Heaven grant not the vain hope—of winning you?"

"Come," was all she said, and lifting her white hands he kissed them.

"It is a prosaic wooing," he went on with a half laugh and a half sigh; "but I am not eloquent, and I knew before I spoke you did not love me; but if you will only listen to me, my dear one, all of life's devotion will be too short to teach you what you are to me. Do not look so distressed. I am not unhappy, and in the meanwhile let

us be good friends, as though this had never happened."

She was greatly touched.

"You must not think that the knowledge of your poverty has anything to do with my decision," she said. "I have always been poor, and yet I have been very happy. When papa lost his little all I had to make my own gowns and do the work of our house, and I don't think I am less a lady because of that," and now she smiled up at him, and her eyes were almost tender.

"You little angel!" he began, impulsively; then added, in a quieter way, "there is dignity in honest labour."

"That is what my father always said; and now, if you please, Mr. Adair, we will walk on," and so they went together, the man and the maid, he not unhappy, because not unhelpful; she less embarrassed than she had believed possible, because her companion did his best to place her at ease.

The next morning he left Gray's Folly, after confiding his romance to Sir Eustace.

"Robin," said the cripple, "may Heaven prosper you in your wooing. You are worthy of her, dear boy; and I would like to see her married to some good man before I am called away."

The young fellow started.

"Sir Eustace, are you ill? Will you not see Benairs? Great heavens, how blind we have been to the change in you! What will Finella say?"

"Tell her nothing yet; let her life remain unclouded, so long as it is possible. I have known now for some time my malady had no cure, and I am sick of life. Let me slip out of it. And when I am gone, even if she cannot give you all you ask, you must always stand her true and loyal friend; for in all the world she has no help but me."

And when Robin had promised they shook hands and parted, and the cripple sat with down-dropped head, muttering to himself,—

"They all love her! How, then, dare I hope to keep her long; but if it might have been. If I could have felt her kind hand on mine at the last—the very last—death would have been most welcome."

The Folly was very quiet when both Alden and Robin had gone; and Finella missed the latter's bright presence not a little. The house seemed strangely quiet now that his ringing voice and honest laughter sounded no more through the lofty rooms and echoing corridors.

"He seems to bring new life with him," said Kemp, "and always brightens Sir Eustace considerably. It is a great pity he can't always be here. Miss Finella, don't you think Sir Eustace is not looking so well as he should? And he gets so easily tired."

The girl turned a frightened face upon her.

"You don't mean you think he—is dying?" she questioned, in a hushed voice.

"Heaven forbid; but he's got just my lady's look when she was struck for death. There! there! you must not cry like that. He would never forgive me if he knew I had made you shed a tear."

"Send for Dr. Benairs, if you please, and leave me alone a little while. I—I am not quite myself," and then the poor child sat in the oriel window, waiting with fast-beating heart and sick sense of desolation for the good old doctor's coming.

He was not long in obeying the summons, and, seeing him, she ran into the hall to meet him.

"Oh!" she said, laying one hand upon his arm, "you must tell me the truth now, and however cruel it may be I will not trouble you or him with tears. Is my cousin very, very ill?"

He laid his hand upon the small, slender fingers.

"My dear young lady, I am afraid there is no hope; that this is the beginning of the end."

She drew a short breath, but remembering her promise made no moan or cry.

"Come and see him," she said, steadily, "and do your best for him." She led the way to the study, and as they entered, Sir Eustace, looking up in surprise, would have spoken, but she was too quick for him. She ran forward, and kneeling beside him, lifted her earnest, loving face to his. "Dear, you have looked pale and ill of late, and I have been so bold as to send for Dr. Benairs. He is going to cure you quickly, I hope," and then he saw great tears shining in her eyes.

"I shall soon be well," he said, very gently. "You should not trouble so greatly over me. Now Benairs, set this little girl's mind at rest, and quickly."

"I must make an examination first. Miss Gray, will you please leave us alone? I will call you presently," and Finella went away with a very heavy heart.

The examination ended, Eustace looked up with a faint smile.

"How long, doctor?" he asked.

"It is a question of months only."

"Keep it from the child."

"Impossible! She is not easily blinded." But she must not know the truth; I forbid it!" almost fiercely.

"I will do my best," and the good doctor went to that interview with Finella, in a far from enviable frame of mind.

She was waiting him in the hall, her face as white as marble, her eyes burning with suppressed feeling.

"Well?" was all she said.

"While there is life there is hope, and with the spring, Sir Eustace may gather fresh strength."

"May!" bitterly. "Do you regard me as a child that you will not tell me all the truth? I am strong enough to bear it. Dr. Benairs, I saw my dear old father die—and yet I lived and kept my senses."

"For your cousin's sake do not agitate yourself. It was by his desire I kept the sad truth from you. Miss Gray, he may last months, but he never will be better or stronger than now—he will not see the end of another year."

How still she stood, her hands pressed hard upon her heart, her lips white and tremulous. Then, having mastered herself, she said gently,—

"Thank you, doctor," and without another word, turned and left him. Straight she went to Eustace, and when he saw her stricken face he knew the truth was no longer hidden from her.

"Finella! poor little Finella!" and the kindly tones broke down all barriers between them, all her self-restraint.

With a passionate cry she flung herself down on her knees beside him.

"Stay with me! stay with me, Eustace! Oh, I think my heart will break! Why cannot I die, I, who do no good, whom no one would miss, not you, best and noblest?" and then tears and sobs checked her speech.

"Little one, it is best as Heaven has ordained it! I am woefully tired of life and pain and sorrow! I shall be glad to go; and you must not grieve so bitterly. I am glad," dreamily, "to think you will regret me a little!"

"I love you!" she sobbed, "I love you, dear cousin! What shall I do when you are gone?"

"Heaven grant I may leave you in some good man's care!"

"Oh, Eustace, can you wish to leave this glad and goodly earth, and all who love and will sorrow for you?"

"It has never been glad or goodly to me! Ah, if I may believe you will not quite

forget me, I shall be more than content! What were those words you sang to me last night? Can you remember and sing them now?"

"Do not ask it! I think I shall never sing again!"

"Then we will pardon you; but the words have dwelt with me all day," he passed an arm about her, and she trembled violently in his embrace.

"I wish I was dead!" she said under her breath. "All that I love must pass away and leave me lonely: but—but for your sake I will try to be brave, dear, I will not vex you with my tears and complainings. Whilst we are together let me nurse you, care for you, minister to all your wants; and" (here the hopefulness of youth asserted itself) "Dr. Benairs may be mistaken—he is not infallible. Don't you think, dear, that if you spent the winter in some nice warm place you would get stronger and better?"

He was not brave enough to dash the new light from her dear eyes, so he answered, lightly,—

"Possibly I might. Suppose we give the subject the consideration it deserves? Bring an atlas, and let us choose our place of refuge."

She obeyed him quickly; and, sitting beside him, pointed out this or that place given over to invalids.

"Madeira, how would that do, Eustace?"

"Too far, little one," for the thought was in his heart, "I would like to die at home." "Pitch on some nice quiet spot in Italy; and then, if Benairs approves, we will be off without delay."

But the doctor did not approve. To Sir Eustace he said,—

"You must be mad to think of travelling in your present condition! Are you so anxious to leave us all that you would willingly shorten your life?"

To Finella he spoke cheerily,—

"Sir Eustace is not strong enough just yet to endure the fatigue of such a journey as he proposes; but, with the spring, I hope to give my consent to it. In the meanwhile, young lady, you must give him every care and attention, and I will look in frequently. Good-bye!" but he knew as he went away that he had crushed the new-born hope in the young girl's heart.

She did not moan or cry. She had promised to be brave, and she was so. Only she was quieter in words and manner, more chary of speech, and hung about the dying man with tender observances that were pathetic in their absolute innocence and love.

She never knew how often she wounded him, how often she tempted him to cry the tragic truth aloud; she only knew he was passing from her, and felt she could not show her gratitude and affection sufficiently.

In any case Eustace Gray could not have lived long; but it was mercifully hidden from Finella that his secret love, his secret sorrow, was hastening his end.

"What will you do when I am gone?" he asked one day. "This place is not entailed; but, unless Alden should be guilty of some grave misdemeanour, I think it should go to him. I have made ample provision for you, dear, and Kemp has promised to watch over you until you marry. I wonder if you would find the little house at Keneway too dull for you?"

"Do not think of me now, dear!" the girl answered, averting her face, less its sudden sorrow should distress him.

"But I must, Finella. I cannot leave everything to the last; I must be setting my house in order. Sometimes I have hoped, dear, you might grow to care for Robin, that even now you had a—well liking for him. Is it so?"

She looked scarcely up at him.

"Would you be glad if it were so? Tell me, tell me! If it is your wish I should marry him, I will!"

"Child, you must make no rash promises; and I should think it a shame to exact such a one from you, knowing well to what heights of unselfishness gratitude and affection carry you. But if at any time you could say with all your heart, 'I love you, Robin,' I would be glad to know you were safe in his keeping. Only this wish of mine is not to influence you in any way, because marriage without love is a holy sacrament profaned."

She was very silent, and he did not press her to tell him, though he knew right well his words would have weight with her, and he prayed humbly enough that they would guide her aright in the near future.

CHAPTER VI.

It was now November, and to the most careless it was evident that Sir Eustace was slipping away from them all, that soon "his place would know him no more."

He had not yet taken to his bed, and on fine mild days he might still occasionally be seen driving slowly along the lonely roads and desolate lanes, always accompanied by his faithful, loving little nurse.

He was sitting by the study fire one day when she entered with a letter.

"It is from Alden, I think," she said, giving it to him. "I hope it contains nothing that may trouble you, dear."

"Read it, Finella. I am too lazy this morning for even such a slight exertion. You have quite spoiled me, little lady."

She opened the letter with an air of caution vastly amusing, and began to read slowly:

"MY DEAR EUSTACE,—

"You will be greatly surprised to learn that I am about to take the holy bonds of wedlock upon myself. After my declaration to you in the summer about a certain young lady you might well be pardoned for thinking this all a jest. But the fact is you were right then and I wrong. That flame was very ephemeral" ("if ever it burned at all," interpolated Finella), "and was consumed by its very fierceness. My second choice has fallen upon a young, lovely, and accomplished American lady. She is a widow, and her name is Minna Goulding" ("I wonder is she rich?" said Finella) "It is a mutual attachment, she being devoted to me. Am I not a lucky fellow? I only want your congratulations to render my happiness complete. Minna objects to show, so we shall be very quietly married on the twentieth instant; shall take a little trip to Paris, and return to our new home on the first of December. Kindest regards to the little Finella, best wishes to yourself from myself and Minna. You must know her soon—and believe me, dear old boy,

"Affectionately yours,

"ALDEN."

"I wonder is she nice?" said Finella, with a look of pity for the bride.

"I hope she is good," added Eustace; "if so she will be poor Alden's salvation. We must have them here for Christmas; it will be the last I shall ever spend with you. Give me my desk, if you please, nurse. I must answer Alden at once."

So the congratulatory epistle was sent, accompanied by a very substantial present, which Alden duly acknowledged, sending by the same post the portrait of the bride-elect whom he described as a pure blonde. She was very pretty, in a childish fashion,

had large innocent-looking eyes, little delicate features, and wore her hair in a mass of tiny curls about the babyish brow. If any fault could be found with her face it was that the mouth was a trifle flat, and the lips a thought too thin.

"I am sorry for her, poor girl," thought Finella; but she only said, "she is very lovely. I wish her all happiness."

"How strange to think of Alden as a married man. Finella, we must have Robin here too. I think my influence will obtain so much concession for him, and we will be quite a merry party. Dear, do you ever think of the lad?"

And she answered, blushing,—

"At times, cousin, when I can spare thought from you; but do not let us speak of him now!"

The first of December came, but Alden had not yet apprised his cousin of his return, much to Finella's surprise.

"Mrs. Gray must be wealthy," she thought, "and he has no longer any need of assistance from his relatives. It is like him to live upon a woman's bounty."

But on the fourth a visitor came to Gray's Folly, none other than Mrs. Alden; and was ushered into the study, where Finella sat reading to Eustace.

She was such a pretty little woman, so carefully and elegantly dressed, that even Finella did not wonder Alden should be infatuated with her.

She advanced with extended hand to Eustace.

"My cousin Eustace, I believe!" she said, with a winning smile; and he rose to greet her in a courtly style.

"I am glad to know you personally, Minna," he answered, kindly; "and where is Alden hiding? Come out, old friend, and receive a welcome;" and he looked towards the door expecting to see his cousin. But the lady said, tragically,—

"He is not here. I have come to you for assistance—we have parted!" and all the while she took no notice of his companion.

"Parted! Great heavens! and it is but a few days since you were married! Sit down and tell me all about it!"

Finella, in a burst of pity, had moved nearer Mrs. Alden, but she shrank back again with a sudden sense of distrust.

The little lady was so calm and composed; there were no traces of tears on her face or in her eyes.

"I come to you because I have heard so much of your justice and goodness," she said, suavely, "and I am a much-wronged woman. Your cousin married me under false pretences, and, after insulting me in every conceivable way, told me he did not intend to support me, or in any respect regard me as his wife."

"What had you done to offend him?" Sir Eustace asked, slowly.

"Nothing; but he married me, believing me to be a rich woman, and I certainly thought his position an assured one. He told me during our brief engagement that he was in receipt of a large and settled income, that he was heir to Gray's Folly, and I foolishly trusted his word. Whilst we were at Paris we lived (I have since learned) on the handsome sum with which you presented him. Then we returned to London, and two days since he proposed I should make over my property to him, and asked for my bank-book. Why, I had nothing of my own. I am a poor, friendless, penniless woman," and here she applied her handkerchief to her eyes; but Finella was certain she was not crying.

"May I enquire if Alden had any reason to believe you rich?"

"None whatever. He told me he loved me for myself alone; and as I—I am not very ugly, I believed him."

She said this with such a naive air that had the event been less serious Eustace could not have repressed a smile. As it was he remarked—

"You must tell me all the facts of the case that I may advise and help you to the best of my ability. May I ask where you met my cousin; by whom you were introduced?"

She hesitated, blushed a little through the skilfully-applied powder, then with down-dropped eyes, answered,—

"I—I—oh! do not be angry with me. I was all alone and friendless; and—and I—that is, we were married through the medium of a matrimonial paper."

She lifted her brown eyes then to Sir Eustace, and saw the handsome face grow colder, the firm mouth take a harder look. He could not forgive indelicacy in a woman. Knitting her pretty brows under her curly yellow hair, she sobbed,—

"Do not think harshly of me, cousin. I was a stranger in a strange land, and nearly all my money was gone. I was afraid of starvation, and when I met him—my husband, and he professed to love me so dearly—I—I was silly enough to believe him, and so we were married."

"I think you have both been playing with two-edged tools," said Eustace, in the coldest tone Finella had ever heard him use. "But as you are not the only one to blame I will say little upon this subject. You shall remain here until some arrangement has been made for your comfort. For the sake of my name I will do my best for you and for him. Finella—by the way, madam, this is Miss Gray—Finella, will you ask Mrs. Kemp to prepare a room for—this lady," and as the girl hastened to obey, glad to escape, he added, "Now, if you please, give me Alden's address. I shall wire him to come down here to-morrow, when I hope this unhappy estrangement may be bridged over."

"Thank you," Minna said, humbly, and then followed Mrs. Kemp upstairs to the dainty rooms provided for her. "Oh, dear," she said, tossing aside her coquettish hat, "what an old fright he is! and that girl is a regular dowdy."

"To whom do you refer, madam?" asked the housekeeper, stiffly.

"Why, to Sir Hunchback and his pauper cousin."

"Miss Finella is not the only person dependent on her cousin," Kemp said, in a dangerously quiet voice, "and if you will excuse the liberty I take, Mrs. Alden, in giving you advice, you will treat her with all due respect. And—and—" here she broke into passion, "you will not dare, in my presence, to ridicule one whom Heaven has seen fit to afflict grievously!" and with that she rustled from the room, leaving Minna to swallow her mortification.

The evening passed uncomfortably, and breakfast the following morning was a most unsatisfactory meal, although the pretty stranger did her best to make it lively.

At noon Alden arrived, looking haggard and savage. But when he entered the room, his bride rose, and, sweeping him a mocking courtesy, said in the sauciest manner,—

"So you have come at last, my dear! I declare I have been so happy here. I have hardly had time to miss you."

But he took no notice of her, as he strode towards his cousin with outstretched hand.

"Eustace, help me to free myself from that adventuress. I never will live with her again."

He was startled when Eustace did not reply to his advance, but only glancing coldly at him bade him be seated.

"Now, let me have the truth," he said. "Nothing else will help you now."

"Well, here it is. I am not a careful fellow; and when I left here last I found myself in a scrape. You had so often and so generously assisted me I could not apply again for help. And then, in an idle mood, I took up a number of the *Matrimonial Despatch*, and amongst other items found this: 'A young, wealthy, and accomplished American widow desires correspondence with gentleman of birth and fortune. View, matrimony. Address Minna, at this office.' Well, I was fool enough to answer, and—there, you know the result. Here I am, tied to a woman who has the audacity to tell me her people are hardly respectable. She acknowledges she is an adventuress; was once governess in a good family (having received a brilliant education), that she entrapped her pupil's grandfather into an engagement, and persuaded him to make his will in her favour. But he died suddenly, and the will was set aside on the plea of the old man's imbecility. Subsequently she became pianist for a travelling professor of mesmerism, whom she afterwards married; and he having shuffled off this mortal coil, she established herself in town, and lived gloriously on unlimited credit until we married. Now I am dunned on every side by her creditors. What the deuce am I to do?"

Sir Eustace rose. In that hour's indignation his figure seemed to grow and expand to manhood's breadth and height; his eyes burned fiercely, and his voice was stern when he spoke.

"What are you to do? Is not your duty clear to you? Each has tricked and deceived the other; neither has any regard for the other. It is a case of bitter being bitten; but having made such a terrible failure of your lives, in Heaven's name do the best you can by each other, and show the world smiling faces. You cannot, must not, remain at the Folly. I will not endure it."

"Then I may make up my mind to starvation," said Alden. The bride only hid her pretty face and sobbed.

"No. After all, you are of my own flesh and blood, and I will not see you want. I will allow you five hundred a year on these conditions, that you never visit me again, and never ask for an increase of your income. As you have made your bed, Alden, you must lie on it, and there are plenty of places where you and—Mrs. Gray may live cheaply, and in comfort."

"I never will live with her again," Alden exclaimed violently, "not even if I forfeit my allowance. I hate her."

"Thanks, monsieur, you are vastly complimentary. Cousin Eustace, how shall I thank you for your generosity? Ah, believe me, I would even return to him," pointing a scornful finger at her husband, "if only to please you. Say, Alden, shall it be so?"

He turned upon her with an oath. She was only an adventuress, but Finella was sorry for her in that hour, and Sir Eustace angrily bade Alden be silent; and having enforced, obedience went on.

"I will give you until to-morrow to decide upon your course of action. If you will neither forget nor forgive past injuries, or supposed injuries, if you refuse still to take back your wife, why, then the proposed allowance shall be divided equally between you. If Mrs. Gray has sinned, you with your superior advantages are still more to blame."

"Do you take me for a pauper that you offer me such a beggarly pittance?" shouted Alden, advancing threateningly; but Finella was too quick for him. She rushed between the two men, while Minna clashed the bell,

saying at the same time, "you coward, strike him if you dare," and the look on her face changed it utterly. Gone was the baby-like innocence and charm. It was almost demoniacal in its hate and scorn. Kemp and the stately Hyde came hurrying to the room, and Finella, in a trembling voice, said,—

"Mr. Gray will lodge to-night at the Chequers, Hyde. Will you please accompany him there; and, Kemp, kindly conduct Mrs. Gray to her apartments."

Gray went out without a word, and, hardened as Minna was, there were tears in her eyes as she looked back at Finella solicitously tending the unconscious man, for Eustace had swooned.

CHAPTER VII.

It is often said that second thoughts are best, and to this conclusion, Alden came.

In the long night watches he decided to take back Minna, and accept the generous allowance Sir Eustace offered.

The bride was clever as well as pretty, and it would be odd if he did not find some employment for her talents that would add to his income.

So long as he behaved fairly well to her he felt sure Minna would not prove an ill-tempered partner and companion; so after a lengthy interview with Sir Eustace, the newly-married pair went away together, and peace was restored to the Folly.

"I am anything but a good woman," Minna had said at parting; "but I am not ungrateful. You have been very kind and generous to me."

And there was real feeling in her voice—there were real tears in her eyes.

Finella almost liked her in that moment. The days went slowly by, and it was palpable to all that Sir Eustace was sinking fast.

"I would like Robin to come," he said, one day. "Write to him, Finella. He is not the boy to blight a wish of mine."

So Robin was sent for, and answered in person as speedily as matters could be arranged.

He was unfeignedly shocked and grieved at the terrible change in his friend.

He was now too weak to walk, and it became Robin's melancholy pleasure to carry the wasted form to and from his room; to share in all Finella's tender ministrations, and as the girl watched his unflinching care, his loving care, his loving anxiety, the sense of her coming loneliness grew greater. Her heart turned towards him, as he had prayed it might.

Sir Eustace watched her growing shyness, marked the blushes which crimsoned her usually pale face when Robin addressed or approached her, and in his unselfish love was glad to think that when he was gone she would not stand alone.

And so one day, when the New Year was very young indeed, he called them to his bedside, being too ill that day to rise.

"Robin, do you remember something you said to me at the close of your last visit? It concerned Finella. Are you of the same mind still?"

"Yes, Sir Eustace, and shall always be," he answered, bravely.

"Give me your hand, Finella. Child, you did not love him then, you bade him go. Is he to go or stay now?"

She was trembling very much, and had grown suddenly pale, and words were not easy then.

"Darling Finella," said her honest young lover, "do not fear to speak the truth. Even should you bid me go I am strong enough to bear my disappointment, and have no cause to reproach you."

Then, still with her eyes downcast, she answered, under her breath,—

"You need not go," and wondered a little at the closeness of Sir Eustace's grasp, the depth of that long-drawn sigh.

"Take her Robin," said he, "and be good to her. Go away a little together, that you may realise your happiness. Heaven bless you both!" and as Robin drew the blushing girl from the room he turned his white and dying face to the wall, muttering, "The worst is over now, Death will be easy, and has no dread for me."

And, indeed, the end was very, very near, and no one knew this so well as Sir Eustace; and the great, generous heart melted towards his unworthy cousin.

"I was a little too hard with him, Finella," he said. "Much of his wrongdoing is due to his early training. I would like to see him again, to know that we parted friends. Send for him—and—we must not put a slight upon his wife. You will not mind having him here for a little while?"

"Oh, no, no, dear; and I will write at once. What would you have me say?"

"Anything you please, so long as the letter is friendly. Poor Alden! With his talents he might do so well. But I am afraid for him—terribly afraid."

"It is nearly over now, old fellow," said Eustace, when Alden came to his bedside, and a wicked thrill of joy shot through the other's heart as he thought; "and all this will be mine!"

But he looked sympathetically into the white face, murmuring words of sorrow that alas! for him (Alden) could no longer deceive the dying man.

Sit down. I want to talk to you, and you look gigantic standing in this dim light. There is so much I have to say, and the time grows short. From boyhood, Alden, we have known my life must be a comparatively brief one, and always you have been taught to regard yourself as heir. Is it not so?"

"I cannot dispute the fact," Alden answered, with a faint premonition of coming trouble. "I am your only male relative."

"Yes, that is so, and—you will forgive plain speech from a dying man. Had your life justified such a will, almost everything I have would have been yours. As it is, I have decided to increase your allowance by two hundred pounds, and to bequeath the estate where I will."

Alden started, and drew a deep breath, but otherwise did not lose his self-control; and the faint voice went on,—

"I dare not leave my tenants and poor pensioners to your mercy, knowing now your love of gambling, and fearing the worst for them. So Gray's Folly and its revenues go to Robin Adair and Finella, who is soon to be his wife—he taking the title of Adair."

Gray Alden's face was perfectly demoniacal then; but the gathering shadows hid this from Eustace, and when he spoke his voice was quite calm and steady.

"You have a perfect right to do what you please with your own; and you have shown yourself most generous to me, who deserve so little. Of course, everything is signed and sealed?"

"No. Torton comes to-day to draw up the new will; the old is still in his possession."

A light flashed on the other's face.

"I am sorry for your disappointment, dear old boy, but Torton cannot be here to-day. Just as I reached Sandfield he was leaving for Greystone on some important business. He cannot possibly return until to-morrow; but I will send for Simmons if you like."

"No, to-morrow will do. I have a few days left me yet."

That night Alden insisted upon sitting up with the invalid. It was his sad privilege, he said, and Eustace consented, knowing well how weary Robin and Finella were with their long nursing.

"You will not go to sleep, or forget to give him his medicine exactly at eleven?" said the latter, preparing reluctantly to leave the room.

"My dear little cousin, you may trust me," and he went to his post; but Finella felt strangely uneasy, and reaching her room did not undress, but sat thinking sadly before the fire.

Meanwhile Alden kept his watch, and presently Eustace fell into a slight slumber. The watcher held his breath and looked down on the sorrowful, beautiful face, with hate in his eyes. Only this man's life, this man's will, stood between him and wealth. The life was nearly over—would it might end to-night before the new will, so fatal to him, could be executed! Any why not to-night?

He shivered and grew cold; all along the murderous thought had been with him, and he knew that in a certain pocket reposed a deadly white powder, which in such a case as this would scarcely lead to suspicion.

Eustace had been ill so long, and the end was so near, if it came sooner than was expected none would be surprised, no inquest would be held.

Heavy drops stood on his brow, his hands were cold as with the coldness of death, and a great horror was upon him. And yet, when eleven o'clock struck, he rose and carefully measured out the medicine Benairs had prescribed; then he opened the tiny packet of powder, and quickly emptied its contents into the glass. But when he would have turned to the bedside once more a small hand grasped his wrist like a vice, and a woman's voice said,—

"Why are you tampering with his medicine? Oh, Heaven, what would you do?" And, before he could reply, another voice added,—

"Have no fear, Finella, I saw it all," and there was Eustace sitting erect, one hand resting upon the silver bell. "Cousin Alden would you murder me? I shall not live to trouble you long. You should have had patience; but I forget, my death would have left you sole possessor here. Alden, how could you dream this thing? Out of my sight, and let me see you no more; take your wife with you. I shall not recall my promise of to-day; you are well provided for, so long as you never attempt entrance here again. Now go, and do not let me see you any more."

He would have defied them both even then, but a small white figure glided in.

"I, too, have seen and heard all. Let us go, Alden, and—and may your cousin forgive you for this, for Heaven knows I never shall!" And so they went out together, wretched husband, wretched wife, to loathe each other more and more as the months wore by, until Minna fell a victim to typhoid fever, and Alden went his own mad way to the bitter end.

But Finella stole to her cousin's side, and falling on her knees, buried her face upon her outstretched arms.

"Oh, my dear, oh, my dear! He would have killed you. How can I thank Heaven for bringing me to you? Eustace, Eustace! my heart is breaking for you."

She was sobbing wildly, but the touch of his hand upon her bowed head in a measure aroused her; and she looked up to see in a flash all the love in his eyes, and on his face. She threw up her hands with a passionate gesture of pity, but could not avoid the yearning look in his deep, dark eyes.

"Finella!" he said, "Finella, forgive me, dear."

And she broke into bitter sobs. Had she, too, given him the cup of grief to drink?

Dying! dying in the early days of manhood! and glad to go! Life was nearly over now, with all its manifold griefs, pains, and perplexities; and the faces bent upon him were full of love and sorrow.

There was Mrs. Kemp crying quietly in her distant corner; there was Robin, too, holding the weary head upon his broad breast; and leaning over the dying man, shedding quiet, but none the less, bitter tears, was Finella.

"Dear," said the falling voice, "you will forgive me that I dared to love you?" and the girl wept more sorely still, as she clasped the poor, cold hands, in hers so warm with young, strong life.

"I never knew, I never knew," she sobbed. "I must have hurt you often, my dear, when I sought only to comfort you, to show you how precious you had become to me—my more than brother."

"Do not cry so bitterly; I am happy now—darling—darling that never could be mine; bend down and kiss me once. It will be no wrong to Robin, my boy Robin. God bless and keep you both."

She leant lower still; her dear lips were pressed to his, her tears fell upon his pale, pale face.

"Heaven bless you—for your goodness," he said, and then she held him close. How still he lay! How cold he was!

She gave one great heart-breaking cry of "Eustace! Eustace!" and then Robin, lifting her in his arms, carried her away, for she had fainted.

There is one grave more in the little churchyard; one grave bright with flowers that have been often watered by very bitter tears, that never will be neglected or forgotten. And in the hearts of young husband and wife, one memory will ever dwell sacred and beloved.

There is another Eustace at Gray's Folly, a laughing boy of three, with his father's face, his mother's eyes—as unlike the dead Eustace, as it is possible to be; although at times, Finella, taking him upon her knees, will search each tiny feature earnestly, as though hoping to find there some faint resemblance to the dear dead, who, whilst he lived, was in dead and truth a man of sorrows.

[THE END.]

ALONE.

When a million hearts are throbbing
With the self-same pain you know;
When a million souls are mourning
With as poignant, bitter woe;
When the world is full of trouble,
Just as hopeless as your own,
You are not alone, my brother,
In your grief you're not alone.
When a billion hearts are leaping
With a joy akin to thine;
When a billion souls are basking
In the glorious, glad sunshine—

In the radiant, rosy beauty
Glancing from the great white throne,
You are not alone, my brother,
In your joy you're not alone.
When ten thousand hearts are longing
To impart their meed of cheer;
When ten thousand tongues are waiting
To breathe comfort in your ear;
Every joy and grief and passion
You have ever felt or known,
Lives in other hearts, my brother—
Never say again "alone."

of the best stories for holiday reading.

Guy Forrester's Secret.

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON.

Author of "IVY'S PERIL," "DOLLY'S LEGACY," "DOROTHY'S HEARTACHE," &c.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Guy Forrester has been disappointed in love through his uncle, Lord Munro, having married when everyone thought that Guy was the only heir to the title and estates. This double disappointment makes Guy reckless, and he is on the point of putting an end to his life when a good angel, in the person of Mr. Smith, comes to his assistance. Mr. Smith makes one stipulation to which Guy agrees, and shortly afterwards Guy leaves England to start life afresh in some distant land. The woman who is really responsible for Guy's misfortunes married a Mr. Jenkins, but the end of the first chapters finds her a penniless widow. Jabez Smith is dead, and Guy returns to England to find that the whole of his fortune has been left to him on the understanding that he looks after Mr. Smith's dear granddaughter, and makes her happy. Anastasia Smith resents being handed over to a man as if she were a parcel or portmanteau, and steadfastly refuses to allow Guy to assist her in any way. The fates in their courses, however, are bringing these two people unwittingly together, and Guy who had already rendered a service to Poppie when they both discovered themselves locked in the cemetery, is destined to aid her yet again. Guy is on a visit to his Uncle and finds Poppie installed there in the capacity of a governess, but he has reason to doubt the necessity for her earning her own living. Poppie is persecuted by Sir Ira Vernon who proposes to her but is resolutely refused, and it is to Guy that she unburies her heart. Poppie, fearing Sir Ira Vernon, suddenly disappears, and it is then that Guy finds himself taking more than ordinary interest in tracing the wanderer's whereabouts.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS ANASTASIA SMITH, the true one who had really officiated in the Disney schoolroom—not the artful adventuress who usurped her name—was certainly a very clever woman; but, like many another talented personage, she was not quite infallible, and sometimes by too great cleverness brought about the very results she most wished to avoid.

On principle Anastasia disapproved of marriage, her theory being that it was an infringement on the Rights and Liberties of Woman (the capitals are her own); but while condemning the ordinance in a wholesale manner she was quite willing to admit that some of the community must be sacrificed for the sake of the rest; that since there must be husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, as long as the world lasted, she must make up her mind to see many deserters from the ranks of spinsterhood, and even submit to the knowledge that wedding-rings till formed an important item in a jeweller's trade.

Some women, Stacy admitted, must be married; others, she said, were so weak-minded that really they were not fit to fight for their rights and privileges as free and unfettered citizens. These, she declared, were certain to fall victims to matrimonial snares sooner or later, as she didn't approve of half measures. Really, the sooner they selected their own particular snare the better for their companions.

She was very fond of Poppie, but she always stoutly maintained that the girl had not sufficient backbone for spinsterhood, and that she should never be surprised to hear of her folly, (Folly was Anastasia's own particular word for designating wedding.)

When pretty, girlish Poppie had left for Ardmore, Miss Smith missed her a great deal more than she would have cared to own, and she awaited her first letter with considerable anxiety; she read it with a prodigious "sniff" when she came to the description of the absent baronet, and forthwith decided in her own mind Sir Ira would return and become the particular snare, which would make Poppie a victim to the bonds of matrimony.

"After all," said the strong-minded woman, as she perused the letter a second time, "perhaps it's the best thing she can do. She's to pretty to be safe from folly for another ten years. She has no vocation for the cause. If this Sir Ira is not worse than most men it may be rather a good plan, but I'll not say a word to let her suggest what I'm thinking of."

And she did not. Anastasia wrote very amusing letters, though rather too full of politics. She filled two sheets easily without bringing in Sir Ira's name, or seeming to notice the postscript in which Poppie alluded to Guy Forrester.

"We've made our choice and told Mr. Forrester he's nothing to us," reflected Stacy, who had a great idea of fairness. "Poppie and I have no more right to go chattering about him than any other stranger!"

As the weeks wore on, and Poppie's letters told her Sir Ira and Mr. Forrester were both at the Castle, Miss Smith sniffed more and more, although the girl told her nothing of Ira's attentions. The astute female reading between the lines, and going as much from what was left out as what was said, knew as well as possible that it only rested with her little friend to become Lady Vernon.

"She'll think I shall be vexed," reflected Anastasia, "and maybe fancy she's bound to keep single just because she promised she would. The best thing I can do is to go away for a bit and not let Poppie know where I am until she's made up her mind one way or the other. It would be against my principles to advise her to marry anyone, but I shouldn't like to vex her by objecting, so I'd better take myself off for a little while."

As the Cause had an office in Holborn, where all letters were taken in for absent members and reforwarded, Miss Smith incurred very little trouble in changing her abode. She had a bad cold, and deeming a month in a milder climate might be good for her, she went off to work at a branch in Torquay, first dispatching the following characteristic note to Poppie:—

"MY DEAR GIRL,—

"I can see from your letters you will soon have to make up your mind on a great question, and choose whether you will continue a free woman or enter the state of bondage. As I don't want to advise you, and have made up my mind not to express an opinion on the matter, I am going for a little change till it is settled. As soon as you have decided write me a line to the office, and I will send you my full address. Whatever you do I shall not blame you, for I have long felt you were one of the weaker vessels alluded to in the Bible, who are, on the whole perhaps, happier in a state of subjection—I am always, my dear Poppie, your faithful and attached friend,

"A. S."

It was late on the day, after his fruitless journey to London, that Guy Forrester drove up to Ardmore Castle. He looked like a man with a heavy trouble on his mind; his features were stern and set, his brows knitted as though in thought. He could not conceal from himself that that he had failed miserably in his undertaking, and had lost all clue to the missing girl; he had written to the countess the night

before, so that she was, in a measure, prepared for his tidings.

One look at his face and she knew he had failed—knew also his secret that Sir Ira's had not been the only heart at Ardmore captive to the pretty governess. She closed the door, and with gentle, womanly tact let him sit down by the fire before she asked a single question. Indeed, even then she made his task easier by telling him her own views.

"Things have happened better than I expected, Guy," she said, cheerfully. "Your uncle and Sir Ira were invited to the hunt dinner, and sent me word they would sleep at Colonel Mortimer's. I was able then, with the help of nurse and Hawkins, to spread the report that Poppie had been summoned to London by the illness of a friend. I don't think if she could be found, poor child, and brought back, any human creature—save those two—would suspect there was anything strange in the manner of her going."

"Then you would take her back?"

Lady Munro sighed.

"I hate mystery, Guy. I think I am even more particular than others that the life of those about me should be open as the day. I have always been severe on anyone 'with a history,' and resented the least attempt at deception; but—"

"You would forgive Poppie?"

"I am so fond of her, and Dollie loves her so. I have great faith in children's judgment. I don't think there would be anything very wrong in the girl my child loved. If I could find Poppie I should say to her, 'Tell me is there anything in your past that makes you unworthy my little girl's affection?' and if she said 'no' I should be willing to risk the rest."

"I think Vernon is sure to speak out when he finds she has escaped him!"

"I do not! I believe Sir Ira will seek her and trust to her gratitude, giving him his reward if he finds her and restores her to happiness."

"I should like to know the secret of her life. Aunt Kathleen, have you no idea?"

"I can only tell you one thing—it was not love! Of that I am convinced!"

"I thought love was at the bottom of all troubles?"

Lady Munro shook her head.

"I should rather think her friends wanted her to marry against her wishes, and to escape she hid herself here under the disguise of Dolly's governess. I have been thinking a great deal about it, and I fancy this is the explanation. The only friend she ever mentioned was a strong-minded spinster, with a great objection to men. This description applies exactly to the idea I had formed of Mrs. Disney's governess before I saw her, and I think now she lent her name and identity to Poppie."

Guy started.

"I begin to see light; but it would be a fraud."

"But few women would think wrong. Poppie Smith was infinitely more suited to instruct my little child than a Girton scholar would have been. The lady may have thought she was doing Dolly a service as well as her friend."

"And then," put in Guy, hurriedly, "Vernon, no doubt, recognized her, and threatened her with exposure?"

"That is what I imagine. He would tell her I should send her away in disgrace, and that she was in danger of imprisonment and ruin. I don't know much about law, but I believe the matter would be magnified by malice into a very grave offence."

Guy bit his lip.

"I found her in tears, poor little thing; and she told me Vernon had threatened to denounce her, and that she was a 'thief' "

With the 2,000th No., ready everywhere next Tuesday,



"I WON'T LISTEN TO YOU IF YOU TALK OF THAT. JIM, WHY WILL YOU WORRY ME?" SAID POPPIE FIRMLY.

and an 'adventuress,' and I believed her."

"Is it possible! Guy, how could you? Why, the child had truth and purity stamped on her brow!"

"I was mad, I think," said Guy, sadly. "You see I had thought her perfect, and when she told me that I felt I could never believe in anyone again."

"Poor child!" said Lady Munro, feelingly. "Why could she not have confided in me? I should have trusted her!"

"It was against you she had sinned! Vernon had taught her to believe you would thrust her from the Castle in disgrace if you knew the truth."

"I think I know it now," said the countess, sadly. "A poor little lonely child; some danger—I cannot quite make out its nature—threatened her, and she thought it a safe hiding-place to come to Ardmore as Dolly's governess. The name of Smith is so common she felt it would conceal her better than any other alias. She knew plenty to teach a little child, and so she saw no harm in the deception."

"And we have lost her!"

"Yes. She told me when she first came she had had a heavy trouble, and she thought work would help her best to bear it. I wonder what the trouble was?"

"An enemy!"

"An enemy! Do you mean it, Guy?"

"I saw her once, before ever she came to Ardmore. It was in a cemetery. She had been to say farewell to her father's grave, and I was able to be of some service to her. She told me then she was going to be a governess, because she wanted to hide herself from an enemy."

"And did she say who?"

"It was a man I gathered. She said he lived in Maryland, but he was coming

home; but for that I should have thought Ira Vernon was the enemy in question."

"We are forgetting one thing, Guy, which may throw some light on our difficulties. A letter came for Poppie yesterday—of course too late for her to receive it: Do you think I am justified in opening it?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Forrester. "It may supply some clue, at any rate. It will give the address of the friend, and we ought to communicate with her at once."

But when the countess read Stacy's letter she felt as much wiser as an unlettered person would do after looking at a page of Greek.

"What on earth does it mean, Guy?" she exclaimed in bewilderment. "I can't make anything of it. Is the writer a man or a woman? and what do they mean by the state of bondage and weaker vessels? I declare they must be mad!"

"Didn't you say her friend was a strong-minded spinster?"

"Yes, with a horror of men."

"Then the matter is simple. The wide-awake female has discerned that serious proposal might be expected, and declines to have anything more to do with Poppie until she has decided to marry him or not."

"Guy, you are a wizard."

He shook his head.

"I have had a little experience of strong-minded women, and am not quite a stranger to their phraseology. I can see the writer wanted to leave Poppie to please herself, and so changed her abode. When the poor girl got to her old home she was told she had gone away and left no address. I have no doubt Miss Stacy acted from the best of motives, but they have had

deplorable results for her poor little friend."

"Was her name Stacy?"

"Poppie always spoke of her so. How is the letter signed?"

"A. S."

"That won't correspond; Stacy was the Christian name."

"Stacy is the abbreviation of Anastasia; if you are sure Stacy was the name of Poppie's friend my theory is right, and she was Mrs. Disney's true governess, and lent her name and identity to her little friend. Mrs. Disney's letter distinctly spoke of Miss Anastasia Smith. When Poppie first came I told her she had a remarkable name; but she blushed crimson, and said she had never been called anything but Poppie."

Guy started.

"Anastasia Smith! Is it possible; but of course it explains all. What a fool I was not to think of it before."

"Do you mean you know her?"

"I have had business transactions with a Miss Anastasia Smith, and am still on cordial terms with her. Just let me look at the letter; I can tell you in an instant whether it is in her writing."

Lady Munro handed it to him, and he bent his head.

"Miss Smith is the granddaughter of a man I esteemed heartily. I am certain she would never lend herself to anything dishonourable. Poppie may not have been a Girton scholar and a governess of experience; but she was a gentlewoman worthy of all respect, or Miss Smith would never have assisted her to enter your house."

"Well I shall soon settle Sir Ira if he comes to me with any slanders; but Guy, all this brings us no nearer to finding her. Poppie is just as much lost to us."

a Complete Novel is given away.

"I shall write to Miss Smith at once; she may possess some clue if we do not."

"But you don't know her address?"

He smiled.

"I think I can obtain it through her lawyers. She is rather an important person in her world."

"Then would Poppie find her easily?"

"I hope so. I can't tell you, Aunt Kathleen, the relief it is to me to find that 'Stacy' is Miss Smith. She gave me the impression of such strength and power that I don't think she could fail to discover her poor little friend."

"Then you will write to-night."

"Yes," He was turning to leave the room when she stopped him.

"Guy!"

"Is there anything the matter, Aunt Kathleen? You look quite troubled."

"It is about you."

"About me!"

"Your uncle meant it as a pleasant surprise, and said I was not to tell you; but, somehow, after what you said about Poppie I can't help thinking we have all made a great mistake; and, instead of giving you pleasure, we shall have placed you in a very uncomfortable position."

Guy looked utterly bewildered.

"I am quite sure you would mean me nothing but kindness," he began; but Lady Munro interrupted him.

"You see the earl had set his heart on your marrying and settling down, and we heard from Sir Joshua no one abroad seemed to please you, so we thought it must be that you could not get over your first attachment, and Mrs. Jenkins being providentially a widow—"

Guy broke in,—

"You have invited her on a visit!"

"Yes. Please don't be vexed. Indeed we meant to give you pleasure. I can see now it was a mistake."

Guy Forrester was touched by her troubled face, and took her hand in both of his.

"Aunt Kathleen, you must not worry yourself in the least. I quite understand the kind motive which prompted you to invite the lady, and I assure you I have no objection to meeting her. All between us was so long ago and I have so completely got over it that she will be to me no different to any other guest I might find in your drawing-room."

"But it will be very awkward for you?"

"Not if you help me—not if you accept my solemn assurance that I am not a marrying man; that if you introduced me to the goddess Venus, dressed after the fashion of to-day, I should be perfectly impervious to her attractions. I am proof against the finest of Eve's daughters."

"And against Poppie?"

His face blanched for an instant, and he pressed Lady Munro's hand so tightly that her rings almost cut into her fingers.

"Then you have guessed my secret?"

"Only to-day. I fancied—"

"I love her better than life itself!" said Guy, hoarsely; "but I will trust you with the truth, sure you will hold it as a sacred confidence. I can never marry anyone."

Her looks asked the question.

"Why not?" so plainly, that Guy bent down and whispered five words into her ear.

Lady Munro felt as though the world must be coming to an end. She could hardly realise she was awake and in her senses. For quite three minutes there was dead silence in the room; then the countess looked up with tearful eyes, and whispered,—

"Oh, Guy, I am so sorry!"

"I need not ask you to keep my confidence?"

"I will keep it from the whole world; but, oh, how terrible it is for you! Can nothing be done?"

Guy Forrester shook his head.

"Nothing."

CHAPTER X.

LONDON by night—that is by lamplight: the New Year was not many days old; the sun, therefore, was sparing of his favours, and, to all intents and purposes, evening began by five o'clock.

At this time it was six. The streets were thinning rapidly of pedestrians; professional men and superior clerks, merchants and managers had gone home; there only remained the large number whose privilege it is to work longer for less money than their more fortunate superiors.

These, too, were pouring slowly out of their offices and warehouses, and in a short time would be ensconced in suburban train, or mounted aloft on an omnibus; but the streets were dull decidedly.

Materfamilias, with her little flock, brought up to town to see the shops decked in their Christmas brightness, had gone home, and the pleasure-seeking lady, escorted by her husband or brother to the pantomime, had not yet arrived upon the scene.

The place seemed given over, for the most part, to the ranks of great-coated bread-winners, who were passing from the place of their daily toil to the bourne whence started train, omnibus, or tramway; but yet there were a few women whom necessity compelled to be abroad, and one of them walked briskly down the Strand, her eyes fixed on the ground, as though nothing about her had power to interest her, a thick roll of papers under her arm, a certain forlorn appearance about her whole being which would have gone to a mother's heart had any mother chanced to see her.

She wore black, and her dress had been good once, but now bore the signs of much wear and of exposure to all sorts of weather.

Despite the January cold she had no jacket, and the little woollen shawl round her shoulders was but feeble protection from the winter's blast; and yet, despite the poverty of her surroundings, she looked and walked as a lady.

As she passed the corner of Wellington-street and paused a moment till the throng of cabs and omnibuses entering the Strand from the direction of Waterloo Station should make it safe for her to cross, a gentleman came hastily round the corner whence he had been to secure stalls for the Lyceum, and in his haste to signal a passing omnibus inadvertently pushed against her.

In a moment he was uttering a courteous apology; then, as she raised her eyes, and for the first moment he saw her face, he started as though he had been shot, and uttered the one word,—

"Found!"

The girl would have brushed past him and lost herself in the crowd, but he was too quick for her. Planting one hand on her shoulder he forced her to be his captive.

"Child, what has happened? What can have brought you to this?"

There was a world of entreaty in her sweet, weary voice as she answered,—

"Oh, let me go! You used to be good to me in the old time. Oh, Jim, for the sake of bygone days let me go!"

The man's answer was to put her hand through his arm, and to walk gently forward with her till they were opposite the entrance to the Temple. Crossing the road, still in perfect silence, he led her through the deserted courts until he came to a set of offices evidently familiar to him. He opened the door with a latch-key and took

his captive into a large, well-furnished room, placed her in a chair by the fire, and then stood watching her as one relieved from some cruel fear.

"Found, thank Heaven!"

"There's nothing to be thankful about," said the girl, with a faint return of the arch manner which had held him captive in his boyhood. "I am a very black sheep indeed, Jim, and the less you see of me the better."

"I don't think so."

"But it is true. Jim, I must go away soon and hide myself. You mustn't ask me where I am or what I do. If you'll agree to that I won't be sorry I met you; it seems nice to see a face I knew in the old time. I want you to tell me all about everything."

With almost a woman's tenderness he had ministered to her creature comforts, poking the fire into a blaze, and bringing a glass of wine and a biscuit from a cupboard.

"I couldn't," she said, shaking her head when he pressed these refreshments upon her. "It would choke me. Talk to me, Jim, and tell me all you can; I haven't heard anything for months."

"Whose fault is that, dear?"

"Don't call me dear," she commanded, "and, Jim, don't look at me like that. I feel almost as if I were my own ghost come back again. Just tell me all you can of what has happened. I suppose the old place is let?"

"No, it is kept in readiness for you. I tried hard to hate the man because he had wronged you; but there must be something nice about him for I never quite managed it."

"Poor Jim!"

"He keeps the place all ready. You have only got to claim it as your home!"

"I never shall, I would sooner starve."

Jim heaved a sigh.

"And you won't listen to me. You know I am just the same; nothing in the world will ever change me."

"No," she said, firmly, "I won't listen to you if you talk of that. Jim, why will you worry me? Do let us be friends, without any of that sort of nonsense."

"If only you could be in love yourself!"

"I don't want to. Jim, I can't stay much longer, and you have told me nothing."

"There's not much to tell. The firm manage all the property still, and there's a report Mr. Forrester is going to marry his old love, Mrs. Jenkins."

"Oh! the girl's colour had changed; and do you think it's true, Jim?"

"I can't say. They're both down at Ardmore Castle. Something may come of it."

"And how's your mother, Jim; and all the people at Trinity? Are they out of the wilderness yet?"

Which needs an explanation. Trinity was the church of her childhood, and the pastor, a worthy man, had but one fault—he always preached about Moses and the children of Israel's journey from Egypt. Now and again he raised the listener's hopes by getting as far as Joshua and the spies, but he had contrived to keep the congregation wandering in the wilderness for more years than Jim and his friend could remember. Perhaps the seat holders of Trinity were a rebellious set, and the enforced wandering was a punishment for their meanness. Jim smiled at the question.

"We're just preparing to go over Jordan," he said, with an air of great content. "We'd bought a silver salver as a Christmas present for the minister; but we all decided we'd better keep it back till we get safely to Canaan, lest the excitement turned his head, and he took us back into the wilderness."

Poppie turned to him with a little sob.

"Oh! Jim, only think! It isn't six

months since I went to Trinity every Sunday, and my life seemed smooth as a sea of glass, and—look at me now."

"My dear," said the young man, fondly, "I think you've made a mistake in fancying you'd be happy amongst strangers. It's not too late to change; we all love you, Poppie. Won't you come back to us?"

"I can't—I can't."

"We'd all be proud to have you," went on Jim, staunchly; "and as to hiding you from him, we'd do it with all our might. Father and mother often say they feel as though they'd lost one of their own children."

"Don't you think it's a pity we didn't all stay children? You were such a dear boy, and I don't think I was very horrid."

"You were the prettiest little fairy I ever saw. Poppie, what are you doing now?"

"Will you keep my secret, Jim?"

"Yes, if you won't tell me without. But oh, child! how can you go like this—you that wore furs and velvet, and had your own brougham and servants!"

"I'm a law copyist," said Poppie, gravely.

"I'll weren't afraid of your uncle, Jim, I'd ask you to give me some deeds to copy."

"Poppie!"

"It's not hard work," she said, gravely, "when one gets used to it, and I earn a lot. Last week I made a whole pound!"

"A pound a week—bring in a pound a week, you! Poppie, it's dreadful."

Her white teeth flashed.

"Don't discourage me Jim."

"When I think of the past."

"Don't," she interrupted; "I never do. Why if I thought of the past and him it would kill me."

"It was a strange will," said Jim, musingly; "but I've often thought, Poppie, we all went to work to make the worst of it."

"Oh, Jim! Remember, you have promised."

"And I'll keep to my word, Poppie. No one shall know from me that you're in London; but you must promise me something in return."

"What is it, Jim?"

"That you will give me your address, and be sure to write to me once a week."

"Whatever for?"

Jim groaned.

"If you'd ever known what love was, child, you'd understand. It's torture to me to think of you alone in London at all; but it won't be quite so bad if I have a line once a week to tell me you're not ill, and know where to find you if you're in trouble."

Poppie stared at him with her big brown eyes.

"I've never been anything but a trouble to you, Jim, and yet you never seem tired of me. Is that love?"

"I expect it is," the young man said simply. "I'm a plain homely fellow, Poppie, but I'm not given to change. With me to care once is to care always."

"I think you must be very good, Jim."

He sighed. Then she rose to go. He walked with her to the Strand, put her in a cab, and stood bareheaded till she was out of sight.

"Oh!" reflected Poppie as she partook of the weak tea and thick bread-and-butter which formed the evening meal. "I wonder if there ever was anyone like Jim! Stacy has failed me; but Jim, who has suffered more through me than anyone else, is as true as steel. I'm quite sure he's like an angel, or he would be if angels had red hair and freckles."

"What a miserable thing love is! I never believed in it myself; but I can't help seeing what misery it brings to everyone else."

And so Mr. Forrester is to marry his old love. Jim is wrong there. I am quite sure she will not be his wife yet—at least, not yet."

Poppie's adventures were very simple. The most heedless of mortals, the bright thought she might hear of Stacy at the "office" never dawned on her. She looked on her friend as faithless, and felt more lonely than she could bear.

No one wanted her. She was one too many. Sir Ira had called her an adventuress, had said no respectable people would ever associate with her. The words cut the sensitive, girlish nature, to the quick. Poppie felt as if she had, indeed, done something which removed her beyond the pale. Henceforth she was an outcast—an alien.

Friendless and neglected, a poor little waif and stray, many and many a time since her arrival in London she had buried her face in her hands and regretted with bitter tears that she was alive.

"If only I could die!" she had sobbed to herself. "No one wants me. There is no place for me in Heaven's beautiful world!"

She had a loyal affectionate heart, and she had loved both Lady Munro and her little daughter very dearly. She missed the mother's kindly face and the child's sweet voice at every turn.

Ardmore had been to her a kind of Paradise until Sir Ira's persecution drove her forth a fugitive.

"I think," decided poor little Poppie, as she laid her head on her pillow the night of her meeting with Jim, "he need not have been so cruel; I never wronged him. If poor Jim forgives me, Sir Ira has no right to complain. And so Mr. Forrester is in love with Mrs. Jenkins. I wonder if he is sorry now?"

What he was to be sorry for she did not say, but she shed bitter tears as she thought over Mr. Forrester and his love affairs. She could not drive the subject from her mind; she lay awake for hours; then towards morning she fell into a restless, broken sleep; and when at the usual time the landlady, a good-natured, motherly creature, brought in the frugal breakfast, it was to find her lodger tossing to and fro with ominous pink spots on her thin cheeks and a fierce, lurid light in her brown eyes. Mrs. Jeeks knew something of illness enough to tell her it was no light ailment that had seized on the poor, lonely girl, and to make her send off her eldest boy in haste for the nearest doctor.

CHAPTER XI.

KATE CARLYLE and her husband never experienced more intense relief than when the time came for them to go to Scotland. Greatly as they both pitied Emmeline Jenkins she had contrived to make their homes so thoroughly uncomfortable that it was with genuine self-congratulation they saw the time of their sufferings arrive, and the day came when the pretty house at Dulwich was to be deserted, its owner travelling northwards, and the fair widow betaking herself to London.

"I feel quite wicked, Percy," said poor Mrs. Carlyle, the last night her sister has to spend beneath her roof, "here am I, the only near relation poor Emmeline possesses, actually glad to get rid of her. I must be a horrid woman."

The barrister smiled.

"If your newspaper was effectual, Kitty, and Mr. Forrester is on his way home, I fancy he will console Mrs. Jenkins for any lack of affection on our part."

"I am sure he is coming home, but—"

"You doubt his constancy. You think

seven years a long time to remain faithful to a false love!"

"It is not that," said the young wife, slowly, "but I am so afraid of Emmeline getting into a terrible scrape in the meanwhile."

"Come, Kitty, she is a good bit older than you, and I have left you alone with the house, servants and children on your hands before now, without any fearful results."

"Emmie has no idea of management; and you know, Percy, fifty pounds is not much to provide everything for six months."

"Barely four," corrected the barrister.

"Mrs. Jenkins has not needed to touch her income yet, I should imagine."

"She has spent—oh! ever so much."

Carlyle whistled.

"Didn't you suggest to her that two pounds a week was not an inexhaustible income?"

"I tried to, but she always said it was her own, and I had no business to interfere."

"Where is she going? I suppose she has condescended to give you her address?"

"Oh, yes. She is going to lodgings in Mary-street, Pimlico (only she calls it South Belgravia). It is a very respectable locality, and she gets the rooms cheap on consideration of taking them for six months."

"Which will bring her to the commencement of the season when her landlady will probably double the rent, or give her notice to quit."

"But perhaps before then she will have met Mr. Forrester, and—"

Carlyle smiled.

"In the meantime, what does she call cheap? How much is she to pay for the rooms?"

"Fifteen shillings a week."

"Just under twenty pounds for the six months. I think, Katy, I had better send the landlady a cheque."

"But you can't afford it, Percy?"

"I'll manage it, and if Mrs. Jenkins has a respectable roof over her head she may have sense enough not to spend more than her income on other expenses."

Emmeline received his offer most ungraciously. She did not want her rent paid as though she were a baby; she might want to move, might not like the rooms. Why could not Mr. Carlyle give her the money simply to augment her income?

But the barrister was firm. He would write the landlady a cheque, and take the receipt for six months' rent, or he would not trouble himself about the matter.

Emmeline had to give in.

"But I shall not stay a week if I'm uncomfortable," she retorted, crossly.

"Please yourself," returned her brother-in-law. "Your sister and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing you are provided with a home. We cannot compel you to reside in it."

"I should think not."

Her lodgings in Mary Street were clean, tidy, and thoroughly respectable; but never was anyone much more disappointed than Emmeline Jenkins when she took up her abode there. To her this coming back to London had meant in some measure a return to her old life. She found herself as lonely and deserted as though she had been a hundred miles away. No one came near her: her whole existence seemed confined to the two rooms she had a right to call her own.

She was not a woman of great intelligence or many resources within herself. Society had been her god, fashion her worship; removed from both, hers was a sorry lot. She took to breakfasting in bed to shorten her

days. Her afternoons were spent in studying *Le Follet*, and her evenings were devoted to novels from the circulating library. She did not spend money recklessly, but she had no idea of portioning out her income and making a fixed sum cover her weekly expenditure. Long before three months had passed she was deeply in debt; her little store had dwindled to less than five pounds. She owed, perhaps, fifty; and, literally at her wits' end, she wrote and begged her sister to come and see her. Miss Carlyle obeyed the summons. When she heard of her debts she shook her head, and positively refused to assist her sister without her husband's knowledge.

"We never had a secret in our lives," she said, simply, "and I can't begin now. Besides, Percy is not a rich man, and it would not be fair to him to take his money to give to you unknown to him."

"If you tell Mr. Carlyle it is as good as refusing. You know he won't let you give me sixpence. I saw quite enough of his meanness while I was at Dulwich."

"Perhaps you forget you were his guest for nearly three months," replied the wife, quietly. "Indeed, Emmeline, I think it is useless for me to attempt to help you. Your income is so small, you will never get on if you are crippled with debt. I see only one plan before you."

"The workhouse."

"Nonsense!"

"I believe you would like to see me there. You were always jealous of me, Kate. You have read in the newspaper that Mr. Forrester has returned, and you want to shut me up in the union to rob me of all chance of becoming Lady Munro."

Mrs. Carlyle could not be angry, the charge was too ridiculous.

"My dear Emmie, if you could fascinate a duke, I would be only too glad to see you a duchess. I assure you I should grudge you no rank, however exalted. The idea of the workhouse never came into my head. Indeed, they certainly would not admit a lady with an income of a hundred a year. What I meant was, you must dispose of some of your ornaments; valuable jewels like yours will always command their price."

Mrs. Jenkins repined much as though she had been required to cut off her hand or foot, but her sister kept firm; and in the end, the suggestion was adopted. Several of her more expensive trinkets left her keeping; their proceeds paid her debts, and even left a margin over. Emmeline was jubilant.

"You see I can keep myself without any help from you," she wrote to Mrs. Carlyle; "and I am now preparing to go to Ardmore Castle, as the Countess of Munro has invited me to pay her a long visit, that Mr. Forrester and I may resume our long, interrupted friendship. Of course it will be hard for you to see me in a rank so far removed from your own; but when I am a countess I will try and induce my husband to do something for your children, my generous disposition being quite ready to forget the scant kindness you showed me last summer."

The Carlyles smiled a little when they read the letter.

"I think she will have to wait some time before she is a countess," said the barrister, cheerfully. "I saw Lord Munro last week, and he looked in the best of health. Meanwhile, Katy, I hope you feel properly grateful to your sister for her benevolent attentions."

"I begin to feel sorry."

"That you showed Mrs. Jenkins such scant kindness last summer? Pray tell her that you are penitent."

"I meant that I sent paper to Mr.

Forrester. He was so nice when I remember him, Percy; and I'm afraid if he marries Emmeline he can't be very happy."

"Leave that question for his own decision, dear. He is no lovesick boy, but a keen intelligent man of the world. Depend upon it if he marries Mrs. Jenkins he will do it with his eyes open, and no persuasion of ours would prevent him."

It was quite a gala day to Mrs. Jenkins when the date fixed for her visit dawned. The train left Paddington at twelve o'clock, but Emmeline began her toilet at nine, so determined was she to look her best.

It was seven years and a half since Guy Forrester had held her in his arms and implored her to be faithful to her promise, swearing his love should make up to her for his loss of fortune.

He had then been a young, careless man of fashion; he was now turned thirty-three. He had travelled and made himself a name; had taken two professions—literature and politics—and made his mark in both.

It was easy to obtain information about a public character like Mr. Forrester. Emmeline had made inquiries, and learned the income derived from his books alone would make him a rich man; besides which he had recently come in for the hoards of some city miser, and was in such favour with the Government of the day that, if he were disposed to accept it, he could at once obtain the post of governor of some Crown Colony, where he would hold a viceregal court, of which his wife would naturally be queen.

As Mrs. Jenkins entered the train she saw herself in fancy surrounded by all the pomp and dignity of exalted rank.

She wondered (she was profoundly ignorant) whether the title of excellency was shareable with a man's wife; and whether the ruler of a viceregal court wore a crown, as representing her Britannic Majesty.

Mrs. Jenkins would have liked both these points set at rest; but, in the meantime, she was perfectly happy in anticipation, and the only unpleasant thought that came to her throughout the long journey was the reflection that, as a widow, she could not wear white satin on the day when she made Guy Forrester happy.

Of course, he would come and meet her; of course, he would be on the platform ready to bid her welcome to Ardmore.

Emmeline was not quite sure she did not expect him to make her a little speech on the spot, laying Ardmore (in the future) and all his wealth in the present at her feet.

She tried to be prepared for any emergency, and resolved that, as poor Septimus had been dead six months, there was not the least impropriety in her looking cheerful.

She wondered if he was altered! She feared her figure was less willowy; her hair of a less dazzling gold than in the days gone by; but, then, she always heard a hot climate ages the appearance prematurely, therefore, no doubt, Guy had altered far more than herself, and would not expect to her quite unchanged. Besides—and this find there was no gainsaying, since the church registrar and the family Bible were both witnesses of the fact—whatever happens, she would always be Guy's junior.

The crucial moment came. Emmeline could see the little rustic station, and feel the slackening speed of the train. She collected her reticule and muff (how she wished she had brought a maid; but even with Emmeline's unbusiness-like notions she was painfully conscious that a lady's maid can not be maintained on an income of less than two pounds a week), and letting down the window stood before it, looking out in a pretty attitude of eager anticipation.

Or it would have been pretty in a young girl. Unluckily Emmeline was no longer young enough to pose gracefully as an *ingenu*. Seven years of ceaseless gaiety, succeeded by six months of peevish inaction and discontent, had robbed her face of its bloom, faded her hair and eyes, and made her look years older than her age. Still, suitably dressed in velvet and furs according to the style adopted by matrons of the shady side of thirty, she would have looked stylish and elegant. As it was, with a thick fringe frizzed over her forehead, a coquettish seal skin toque on the back of her head, a very tight jacket, much too juvenile for her figure, and a perpetual showing of her teeth after the fashion of the waxheads sometimes exhibited outside dentists by way of advertisement, she looked—a something very much to be avoided.

Lady Munro had sent the invitation at her husband's wish. Her interview with Guy, the day of his return from London, taught her that, as far as he was concerned, the widow would come on a fruitless errand. But it was impossible to put off her visit; and Lady Munro, a very kind-hearted woman, felt that a month or so in a luxurious house, with every comfort and attention might be a very pleasant change to Mrs. Jenkins after her lonely lodgings. A rapid review of the whole circumstances told her no harm need come of the widow's stay. She had never mentioned Guy in her note of invitation. Surely a lady might stay a few weeks in the same house as an unmarried man without expecting him to propose to her!

Besides, Mrs. Jenkins might be a nice sensible woman who would eschew all such follies as love-making, and then her husband had not been dead six months. It would surely be possible to make much of her, and let her have a thoroughly enjoyable visit without drawing Guy into an equivocal position. She would herself be rather glad of a lady's company, for she still missed Poppie at every turn, and her little girl's perpetual inquiries when her playfellow was coming back made Dolly rather a trying companion.

"Will you come with me to meet Mrs. Jenkins?" said the countess to her lord at luncheon.

"I think not. Guy will escort you, no doubt. I have promised Vernon to go over to Fairlawn with him."

Kathleen and her nephew exchanged glances, the result of which was that Guy followed her to the boudoir when they left the dining-room.

"Shall I come with you?" asked Guy, uncomfortably. "You know I am entirely at your disposal."

The countess shook her head.

"It would never do, Guy. We must manage things very carefully, or there will be misunderstandings. I mean to be very kind to Mrs. Jenkins; but I don't want to let her imagine for a moment I regard her as my future niece."

"I think I had much better go away."

"It will be a real trouble to us if you do not spend Christmas at the castle," her voice almost broke. "It is our first Christmas since our boy's death, and I want things to be as different as possible from other years. When once the new year is turned I won't say a word to stop you if you really wish to leave us."

"You know why I wish to go?"

"I don't; unless," she looked at him keenly, "you want to go and look after your very independent ward."

He sighed.

"My ward declines all interference."

"I shouldn't let her."

"You haven't seen her."

"There must be something good in her,"

said the countess, firmly, "or Poppie wouldn't have loved her so."

"The very thing I tell myself. But Aunt Kathleen, you will be too late." She smiled.

"What shall I say about you to Mrs. Jenkins? Shall I represent you as eccentric, misanthropical, or what?"

"I think the wisest plan would be to steer clear of my name."

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1904. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

A GOLDEN DESTINY.

By the author of "Redeemed by Fate,"
"The Mistress of Lynwood," &c.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SIR TRAVICE LEIGH, true to his resolve, met Lord St. Croix on the ship's arrival in dock, and, to his great astonishment, found him accompanied by a young girl, who at the moment of stepping on the quay had her veil down.

"Sir Travice!" said the viscount, as soon as the greetings were over, "I have many things to explain to you, but at present there is no time to do it, for I must hurry straight down to Wyndhamstowe with my witnesses, and defer explanations until a more favourable opportunity. In the meantime, I want you to do me a great favour."

"Name it," said the baronet, not mentioning that he, too, had several explanations to make.

"I want you to take this young lady—Miss Duval, to my aunt, Lady Westbrooke, and ask her to shelter her for a few days—until I come to town, in fact. You know Lady Westbrooke very well, do you not?"

"Very well, indeed, and I shall be happy to execute your commission."

Therefore it happened that while St. Croix looked after the three witnesses, and hurried them off to Paddington, Sir Travice put Irene in his carriage, and told the coachman to drive to Lady Westbrooke's, in Park Lane.

The girl still had her veil down, and had only spoken a few words of thanks to the baronet for his kindness. Her voice, however, had startled him, so clearly did it bring back the remembrance of another voice, once dearly loved, and now silent in the grave.

He was too thorough a gentleman to tease her with questions, or, indeed, to trouble her with remarks at all, when it seemed her desire to be quiet, so nearly half of the drive was accomplished in silence. Then Irene, who felt rather suffocated by the thick veil St. Croix had entreated her to put on, threw it up, and turned with a little smile to her companion.

"I am so hot," she said, in excuse for her action, but she started back in surprise as she met the baronet's eyes, for they were fixed on her face in a wild stare, that had, however, nothing of rudeness in it.

"Who are you?" he asked, breathing very quickly.

"My name is Irene Duval. I am the niece of the Mrs. Sumner who is an inmate of your household," she replied, simply.

"I remember hearing them speak of you," he muttered, wiping off the perspiration that had started to his brow. Then growing calmer, he added, "I beg your pardon. You doubtless think my behaviour strange, but your face startled me! It is the exact reproduction of my dead wife's. Has not your aunt told you this? She knew my wife quite well."

Irene shook her head.

"My aunt has told me very little, but then I have not seen much of her."

The baronet was silent for some time, apparently lost in thought, but he never once took his eyes from the girl's face, and the more he looked the more familiar did it seem to him.

Nothing was said, however, until the carriage drew up in front of one of the smallest, but prettiest houses in Park Lane; and then when the footman inquired for Lady Westbrooke, he was told she had gone away into the country to stay with friends, and was not expected home for a week or ten days.

Irene, as she heard the answer, looked at Sir Travice in consternation, but he reassured her with a smile.

"My dear, I am old enough to take care of you, and if you will trust yourself to me I will do so," he said, and then, he told the man to drive on to the "Langham," and when they arrived there Irene was shown into a sitting room, while the baronet ordered some tea to be taken up to her.

"May I have a cup with you?" he asked, after his orders had been obeyed, and the girl gladly assented, for she had taken an impulsive liking to the noble-looking baronet, who, on his part, made no effort to disguise the interest he felt in her.

"Now," he said, presently, "I want you to tell me what you would like to do? Shall I take you down to Woodleigh Court, or would you prefer remaining in London?"

The truth was, he felt somewhat puzzled what to do with her—not that he wished to shirk responsibility, but that he did not clearly understand how she came to be in Lord St. Croix's company.

His faith in the young Viscount was too great for him to think for a moment that there was, or could be, any impropriety in their relations, but assuredly there must be something out of the common in them all the same.

Perhaps Irene instinctively felt something of this, for she said impulsively,

"Will you let me tell you my history, and then you will be better able to give me your advice?"

"Assuredly, my dear!" he responded gravely.

Whereupon Irene told him of all the adventures that had befallen her since she left the Belgian convent.

"Then you actually came to Woodleigh Court?" he exclaimed in astonishment, interrupting her narrative.

"Yes," she said. "I happened at the convent to pick up a letter from Mrs. Henry to the Mother Superior, and it had 'Woodleigh Court, W—shire,' on the top, so from that I knew my aunt must live there."

"Up to that time you did not know where she lived, then?"

"No, for it was kept a secret from me, and all the letters I wrote were forwarded through the Mother Superior."

"Strange!" murmured the baronet, thoughtfully. "What reason could there possibly have been for all this secrecy?"

Irene shook her head. It was a question that had often puzzled her, and to which she could find no answer.

"Where did you get the money from to make your escape?"

"I had some money hidden away, which Majorie Wyndham had given me when she left. She was only there two years, but we became great friends in that time, and then"—she blushed a little—"Lord St. Croix lent me some more when I met him in London."

"From London you went straight down to Woodleigh Court?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me all the details of your

visit there—even the minutest," said the baronet, who was deeply interested in her story.

"I will do so. When I got to the door I enquired for Mrs. Henry, but the butler shook his head and said there was no such person there; but just as I was beginning to despair he said he would see if Mrs. Seymour could help me, and went away upstairs. When he came back he brought with him the person whom I afterwards learned to call Mrs. Sumner, and she at once hurried me upstairs into her bedroom, and looked me in while she was absent."

"What do you mean by 'hurried you upstairs'? Did she seem not to wish anyone to see you?"

"Yes; or, at least, she gave me that impression. She looked pale and frightened, and when she came back she made me put a thick veil over my face, and took me downstairs by a back way, and put me into a close carriage in which a lady with dark hair was already seated. She also had a thick veil on, but I once heard my aunt call her 'Mrs. Seymour,' as if inadvertently. They both went with me to the Dower House, and then the lady went away."

"And all this took place in my house, without my hearing a word about it!" exclaimed Sir Travice. "But go on with your story," he added, quickly, and he did not interrupt her again until it was concluded.

Then he got up and began pacing the room, agitated by thoughts that, wild and improbable as they seemed, yet had a basis of facts. When he came back to his seat, he said,—

"I do not believe in Mrs. Henry's, or rather Sumner's, explanation. Her position is not such that she could be injured by the fact of your father's guilt to such an extent as she pretends, and I am sure she has some other reason for wishing to get rid of you. Did the friends she spoke of meet you at Melbourne?"

"Yes! An old woman met me, but Lord St. Croix told her I was going back to England, so she troubled no more about me."

Again Sir Travice was silent; then, with an accent of sudden determination, he exclaimed,—

"I will take you down to Woodleigh Court, and wring the truth from these women without delay. You may trust me for not letting you get into their power again. I will look to your future myself. I am older than Lord St. Croix, and a more fitting guardian for you. We will start for W—shire first thing to-morrow morning."

Irene did not demur. The rapidity with which events had lately trod on each other's heels bewildered her, and made her feel almost helpless. Besides, she trusted Sir Travice, and he looked like a man who would not only do right himself, but would force other people to do so as well.

She was glad of a night's rest. It was long since she had slept in a clean, comfortable English bed, and the sensation was all the more agreeable because of its novelty.

The next morning, accordingly, she and the baronet started by the first train for W—shire, and reached Woodleigh Court at about one o'clock. They took a cab from the station, for Sir Travice had not sent word of his intended arrival, therefore no carriage had been sent to meet them. As it happened, too, no one saw them enter the house except the butler, who looked rather astonished when the baronet took his young companion into his study, only pausing to say,—

"Is Lord St. Croix in?"

"No, sir. He is at the Wyndhamstowe Assizes, seeing after Mr. Fraser's case."

"Bring some luncheon into my study,

then, a few sandwiches and a bottle of claret, and you need not mention that I have come home."

The butler bowed and went away, and when Irene had taken off her hat, Sir Tralice went to the end of the room, and, touching a spring, drew aside a panel in the wall, thus revealing an oil-painting—the life-size portrait of a lady.

"Come here, my dear, and look at this!" he said, in a voice that trembled slightly. "Tell me if you have ever seen anyone like it before?"

The young girl obeyed, and looked at the picture for a few seconds with a half-puzzled expression, that presently changed to wondering recognition.

"Why, it is myself!" she exclaimed, turning to her companion as if to ask the meaning of it.

And, indeed, so like her was the picture that anyone might have mistaken it for her portrait. There was the same golden hair, the same lovely, pouting mouth, the same delicately chiselled nose and dimpled chin; the deep blue eyes, too, were exactly similar, and, more wonderful than all, the expression was identical!

"It is my wife!" said the baronet, looking from one to the other; "but surely such a likeness as exists between you cannot be accidental!"

"I think," Irene said, simply, "this lady must have been a great deal more beautiful than I am. She has a sweet face!"

"She had, and so have you! Indeed, the two faces are reproductions of each other; and if it were not such a wild idea I should believe you were my daughter!"

Irene gazed at him in wonder. His face was very pale, and he was evidently greatly moved.

"You had a daughter then?" she said, softly.

"Yes; and my wife died when she was born. At first I could not bear to look at the child, remembering what her birth had cost me, and so I went away to Egypt, leaving her in the charge of my sister-in-law, Mrs. Seymour, who was the widow of my half-brother, and who herself had a little baby daughter. She took the children to a little seaside place in Wales, and it was there my little girl died, when she was just twelve months old. I go to see her grave every year, and have done so ever since she died!"

"But if she is dead how could I possibly be your daughter?" asked the girl.

"My dear, you do not understand. Mrs. Seymour is, and always was, an ambitious woman, and she knew that I should probably never marry again, so that if anything happened to my child her own would be my heiress. Don't you see what a temptation it would be to her to declare that my daughter died, in order that her own should take her place?"

"Oh, she could not be so wicked! It is impossible—impossible!" cried the young girl, in horror.

"So I should have thought a little while ago, but my eyes have been opened lately, and I see how greatly I have been deceived. Of course, my supposition may not be a true one, and it would never have occurred to me but for your wonderful resemblance to my lost Beatrice, and the fact of so much trouble having been taken to get you away from England. The circumstances are so mysterious that they naturally make one suspicious; and, besides,"—he bent down and kissed her brow—"some instinct tells me that I have a father's right to love you."

At that moment the butler came in with the luncheon-tray, thus prosaically interrupting a conversation that had stirred the hearts of both to their inmost depths; and

hardly had he departed before there came an imperative rap at the door, and the voice of Mrs. Seymour was heard outside, demanding admittance.

Irene looked rather frightened as she heard the quick, imperious tones, but the baronet reassured her by a swift gesture, and then said, in a low voice,—

"Stand beside the picture, and let your hair fall over your shoulders as it is there."

Irene obeyed, taking the comb from her hair, which tumbled in rich yellow masses far below her waist, and this still more increased her likeness to the portrait, which was still uncovered.

Then Sir Tralice opened the door, and Mrs. Seymour came in.

CHAPTER XLIV., AND LAST.

SHE paused on the threshold, and her eyes grew wild and wide as she gazed at the tableau at the end of the room—the pictured woman in the frame, and the living one out of it.

Irene stood motionless, controlling her features as best she could, while the Baronet watched his sister-in-law's face with keenest attention, determined that not the slightest change of expression should escape him.

Strong as Mrs. Seymour's nerves were, perfect as she flattered herself was her control over them, it was impossible to prevent her countenance betraying how deeply she was agitated. The fact was she was taken so entirely by surprise that for a moment she could hardly realise the situation, and a half stifled scream broke from her lips before she could prevent it.

It must be borne in mind that she believed Irene to be safely away in Australia, and had quite made up her mind that she should never see her again; so that at first she did not really recognise the girl, but fancied some phantom was standing before her, to accuse her of a crime which she hoped the long years had buried for ever.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried out. "It is Beatrice herself come back from the grave!"

"No!" cried Sir Tralice, seizing her by the wrists in a firm grip. "It is not Beatrice herself, but her daughter, come back from Australia to tell you your sin has found you out."

This was a bold speech on his part, but it did not fail of its intended effect.

The wretched woman fell on her knees at his feet, her lips murmured some inarticulate syllables, then she fell prone on the floor, in a dead faint.

Irene, forgetful of everything but the fact that a fellow-creature was in distress, rushed to her side, and knelt down, chafing her cold hand, and beginning so unfasten her dress.

"Call assistance—get restoratives, or she may die!" she exclaimed, divine pity shining in her sweet blue eyes, and irradiating her face.

"She will not die," Sir Tralice returned, quietly; but he went outside and told the footman to call Mrs. Seymour's maid, and in a few minutes Sumner appeared.

By this time, however, the baronet had insisted on Irene leaving the insensible woman's side, and resuming her former attitude by the picture, so that when Mrs. Sumner came in her eyes were immediately fascinated by the same tableau as had so alarmed her mistress, and certainly her fright was quite as great, although, to do her justice, she showed it less.

Unlike Mrs. Seymour, she never for a moment thought the figure supernatural. Her mind was totally devoid of imagination, and, in spite of the seeming improbability,

at once leapt to the right conclusion—namely, that the young girl had somehow returned from Australia.

But how? And what brought her here, with Sir Tralice, and what had happened to cause her strong-minded mistress to lose her senses?

All this flashed through her mind in less time than it takes to write it, and at the same moment she exclaimed,—

"Irene!"

"Who is that young lady?" asked the baronet, who had rapidly decided what course of conduct to pursue.

She looked at him doubtfully for a moment out of her cold, grey eyes. Not knowing how much he knew, she was at a loss what to reply. Still, an answer of some kind was imperative, so she gave it in a low, but steady voice.

"She is Irene Duval, my niece, Sir Tralice!"

"You lie!" cried the baronet, sternly. "She is my daughter, Beatrice Leigh, whom you and that woman there have kept from me all these years."

Sumner looked at her fainting mistress with an expression of deepest scorn.

"Has she confessed, then? Fool! Wild horses should not have wrung the truth from me," she said, her lips curling.

And it was impossible not to give a certain meed of admiration to the woman's iron will, which would indeed have carried her unflinchingly to the stake or the scaffold.

"What baby was that you buried as my child?" asked Sir Tralice, still pursuing the line he had marked out when she first came in. "You may as well reply," he added, as she hesitated, "for, of course, I shall be able to find it out, whether you assist me or not."

"As you know so much I see no reason why you should not know all," she returned, with a shrug of the shoulders. "The baby we buried was my sister's child—Irene Duval—who was a delicate little thing, and had come down to Wales for the benefit of the sea air. She was older than Beatrice, but not much bigger, so the deception was easy enough."

"And your sister knew of it?"

"She was dead at the time, and her husband was in prison, so neither of them had a chance of interfering with our plan. It was I who suggested it," she said, with cool bravado, "and it was I who carried it through. She" with a glance at Mrs. Seymour—"had no trouble over it whatever."

"Then you took the child to the convent?"

"I did, and declared that she was my own niece, and I assumed the name of 'Henry' in order that if she ever tried to trace out who I was she should fail. You must confess, Sir Tralice, that the plot was a clever one."

"Yes, but you forgot one thing when you conceived it."

"And that?"

"The eternal justice of Heaven," returned the baronet, solemnly, "which never permits crime to go unpunished, either in this world or the next. The only thing I can say to you is that you have been true to your mistress."

"And I will be true to her until death!" cried the woman, with unexpected passion.

This was the one vulnerable point in her cold and selfish nature—love for the mistress with whom she had lived for so many years—for whose sake she had schemed and contrived, and steeped her very soul in iniquity.

As she spoke she bent down by Mrs. Seymour's side and lifted her head on her arm,

while Sir Travice poured out some brandy into a cup, which she held to the pale lips; and presently consciousness came back with a long fluttering sigh, and Mrs. Seymour's dark eyes opened on the anxious face of her maid, who was bending over her, thus preventing her from seeing anyone else in the room.

"Oh, Summer! Sir Travice knows all!" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "What shall we do—oh, what shall we do?"

"Of course he knows all. Did I not tell you that if he once saw her he would guess it?" asked the maid, with some contempt. "Nature herself was bent on betraying the secret, for such a likeness as she bears to her mother don't come accidentally."

Two hours later Lord St. Croix and the detective drove up to the door of Woodleigh Court, and it was easy enough to see from the demeanour of both that they were the bearers of good tidings.

"I shall only just change my clothes before driving to the station and going up to town," the viscount said, as he sprang down; but this intention was not destined to be carried into effect, for at the door he was met by no less a person than the baronet himself, who drew him into the study, where, pale and agitated, but with a strange look of joy on her face, he found Irene.

He looked from one to the other with astonishment.

"Are you wondering what this means?" said the baronet. "A great joy has come upon both of us, and it lies in the fact that I have discovered Irene to be my daughter!"

The young man's surprise may be imagined, but it never once struck him to doubt the assertion, strange as it seemed, and in a few sentences Sir Travice explained how the discovery had been made.

"I congratulate you with all my heart, Sir Travice, and you too, Irene," he said, shaking hands with both of them in turn, and then he went to the window and pretended to look out, so that they might not see how agitated he was.

Irene came to his side, and laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"I shall never forget how good—how more than good—you have been to me!" she said, brokenly. "Words can but ill-repay you."

With a great effort he conquered himself, and raised her hands to his lips.

"I would do a thousandfold more for you than it has been in my power to do if I could!" he said, and as he spoke Sir Travice looked at them with strange earnestness. Perhaps he guessed their secret.

"There is something else to be done," he said, coming between them and drawing Irene's hand tenderly through his arm, "and it has to do with you and Ermentrude. Come to the drawing-room, and stay there with Irene until my return."

He led the young girl into the stately and luxurious drawing-room, of which Mrs. Seymour had been mistress so long, and then left them, returning in about ten minutes, accompanied by Ermentrude, while Wise sauntered in after them, followed by Villari.

"What is this? I don't understand," Ermentrude said in a bewildered tone, as she caught sight of Irene and St. Croix, and Villari turned rather pale, while his brilliant eyes roved enquiringly from one to the other.

Sir Travice replied to the question by another.

"Where is your mother?"

"She told me to say she was not well enough to come downstairs."

Sir Travice turned to Wise with an unmoved countenance.

"Go and tell Mrs. Seymour it is absolutely necessary she should be present."

The detective proceeded to obey, and presently returned with Mrs. Seymour, who, although deadly pale, had yet entirely recovered her self-control. She seated herself quietly on a couch, motioning Ermentrude to her side, and then folded her hands in her lap, and prepared to listen.

"I wished for your presence, because what I am about to state nearly concerns your daughter, and therefore, concerns you," began Sir Travice, in his coldest voice. "Ermentrude was engaged with my consent to Lord St. Croix, whom I love and honour as my own son; but when that consent was given I was unaware of her true character, and since then, circumstances have come to my knowledge which have given me great pain, and which it is only just Lord St. Croix should know." He turned now to the young Viscount, and spoke with even greater deliberation. "When she accepted you as her promised husband, Ermentrude was in love with Mr. George Villari, my secretary. She had been in the habit of giving him assignations, and continued them even after your ring was on her finger. She wrote him letters, one of which came into my possession, and in it she distinctly states that she loves him, but intends marrying you for the sake of your wealth and title. What have you to say to her?"

It is impossible to describe the varying expressions of the different people assembled while the baronet was speaking.

A look of supreme terror came in Ermentrude's eyes, while those of her mother expressed an even greater degree of anguish; and Villari stood like a statue, his eyes fixed on the ground.

At last Mrs. Seymour spoke.

"What is your authority for making these vile assertions against my daughter's honour?"

"I am!" said Wise, quietly stepping forward.

Mrs. Seymour surveyed him with a look of deepest scorn.

"And do you believe all this low man cares to imagine?" she demanded of the baronet.

"I believe what he says when it is confirmed by my own eyes," he returned steadily. "I saw Ermentrude's letters, and I was a witness of one of her meetings with Mr. Villari, which took place close upon midnight. After this, you will see the impossibility of denial; and, indeed, I advise Ermentrude to attempt nothing of the sort, for it is quite useless. I have made this semi-public declaration in order that Lord St. Croix may be released from his engagement without delay. Of course, if he is deeply in love with her, and likes to forgive her deceit, he can do so; but if I were in his position I should most certainly do nothing of the kind, and, at all events, none of the responsibility shall rest upon me. Ermentrude, give Lord St. Croix back his ring!"

She dared not disobey. A coward at heart, she had only her mother to lean upon in this emergency, for Villari spoke never a word, and now Mrs. Seymour was silent.

Events were too great for her—it was no use struggling against fate!

Ermentrude slowly and regretfully drew the ring off her finger and held it out. How the diamonds sparkled!

She had never thought it so beautiful as she did at that moment of renunciation.

In silence Harold took it from her hand, and put it away in his pocket, silently

wondering how many more surprises this eventful day was destined to bring forth.

"There is yet another point to be mentioned, and it is that Lord St. Croix's would-be murderer is discovered," went on Sir Travice, like some pitiless embodiment of justice. "George Villari, I charge you with having fired the shot that was aimed at a fellow-creature's life, but which, providentially, failed of its intended effect; and although you may not be an assassin in the legal sense of the term, yet you must be so considered by Heaven, yourself, and your fellow men!"

The Italian never moved or lifted his eyes. Ermentrude cast one frightened glance at him, then leaned her head on her mother's shoulders, and burst into a storm of sobs.

"You may go," said Sir Travice, after a lengthened pause, and pointing sternly towards the door. "I take upon myself to promise that you shall not be prosecuted, because I do not want my family honour to be dragged before the public, but I insist on your leaving England without delay. Go and pack your things, and when you are ready to go you shall have a cheque given you for what salary is due to you."

Still without raising his eyes Villari left the room—as he leaves our pages for ever!

"I think, Wise, we may dispense with you for a little while now," said the baronet, and the detective bowed and walked quietly out, thus reducing the party to five.

"After this," observed Sir Travice, addressing Mrs. Seymour, "you will not be surprised that I should ask you and your daughter to find another home. In spite of the base ingratitude you have both showed towards me I shall not forget you are my dead brother's wife and child, and a suitable provision will be made for you; but I have no desire ever to see you again—unless, indeed, time works a beneficial change in both of you, in which case I may see fit to alter my present decision."

He had made no mention of the change of horses, which had been so nearly fatal to his own life. In point of fact, he was simply sick of all the wickedness which it had fallen to him to expose, and wished to make as quick an ending of the disagreeable scene as possible.

Besides, as he did not intend prosecuting Villari, it was no use dragging in another instance of his villainy.

Mrs. Seymour felt absolutely prostrated by this—to her—most terrible scene, and as Sir Travice finished speaking she rose, and leaning heavily on Ermentrude's arm, passed out.

Perhaps the bitterest drop in her cup was the knowledge that, in spite of all her efforts to make her daughter a great lady, Ermentrude had deceived her as much as anyone. Both had now reaped their just reward.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Travice, drawing a long breath as the door closed upon them, "the atmosphere seems purer now they are gone. You are looking very thoughtful, St. Croix."

"Yes," said the young nobleman, "because I have a secret which I think it is now my duty to tell you. Sir, I love Irene. I can call her by no other name yet; but although I told her of my love, we both decided that honour bound me to Ermentrude. It does so no longer, and—"

"What!" cried the baronet, as he hesitated; "you would take my little girl away from me the very moment I have found her? Well," with a melancholy smile, "I suppose I can expect nothing else, and I would rather give her to you than anyone I know. Still, it is hard to lose one's daughter—"

"Papa!" interrupted Irene, very softly,

as she came to his side, and laid her golden head on his breast, "you will not lose a daughter, but gain a son!"

By-and-bye, when they grew a little calmer, Irene asked St. Croix how Roy Fraser's trial was progressing, and at the question the young man's face lighted up with animation.

"It is over," he said, "and Roy is a free man. When the jury heard what my witnesses had to say, and especially when Madame Castro identified the dagger with which the crime was committed as one she had often seen in James Stone's possession, they immediately returned a verdict of 'not guilty,' and Stone was apprehended, and will be brought up before magistrates to-morrow."

And now our story is at an end, for there is little more to tell.

The little, however, shall be added in as few words as possible, for the events of which we have written took place just twelve months ago, and by taking a swift glance at Woodleigh Court we shall see what the year has brought forth to our heroes and heroines.

There is a garden-party at the Court to-day, given by Sir Trarice in honour of the return of his daughter and son-in-law, Lord and Lady St. Croix, from their honeymoon.

Very proud, indeed, is the baronet of his lovely daughter, and he and the Earl of Dunmore, as they walk arm-in-arm across the terrace, and survey the gay groups in the lawns below, tell each other that if you search all England through you will not find another bride so fair as she!

This opinion may be a prejudiced one, and is certainly not shared by Roy Fraser, who thinks his Marjorie beats every other woman under the sun!

Quite right that he should think so too! They have been married six months now, for the squire had immediately given his consent to their union when he learned that all this long time they had loved each other so truly; and the wedding had taken place at Wyndhamstowe Church amidst a crowd of eager spectators, who had strewn Marjorie's path with the fairest flowers as she came down the churchyard path, smiling happily through her tears, while the villagers rent the air with their loud cheers for the bride and bridegroom.

James Stone's trial never took place, for when the warder went to his cell the morning after his apprehension he discovered the bird had flown, and it was found impossible to recapture him.

It was not the first time Mr. James Stone had made his escape from prison, and in all likelihood it would not be the last!

Probably he went back to Australia, and may be there at the present moment.

Mrs. Seymour and Ermentrude went to the South of France, accompanied by Sumner, and the society papers said that the health of the former demanded a warmer climate.

When last heard of, Ermentrude was being distinguished by the attentions of an earl old enough to be her father, but as she encourages them she may even yet obtain her heart's desire and wear a countess's coronet.

Wise, the detective, was suitably rewarded for his exertions, and has a standing invitation to Woodleigh Court, which he avails himself of in the intervals of business; but he has not yet proposed to the sewing-maid, Amolla, although he tells himself sometimes, with a sigh, that she would make a good wife if her nose was not so red!

Euphemia, the "slavey," who sent word to St. Croix of Irene's abduction, has now

left Mrs. Marlow, and is one of the housemaids at Woodleigh Court, where, dressed in a pretty cotton dress and cap, she is hardly recognisable as the dirty but kind-hearted girl who with such difficulty indited the note to the viscount.

She adores her young mistress—as, indeed, do all the rest of the servants—and is supposed to be not entirely indifferent to the charms of James Jenkins, the groom!

Old Mr. Fraser, of Glen Royal, has not yet forgiven his grandson for deserting him in favour of his mother; but, as he sent Marjorie a very handsome wedding present, it is to be inferred that his heart is softening towards him, and in course of time a reconciliation will take place, in which case Marjorie's marriage won't be such a *mesalliance* after all, seeing that Glen Royal is a very large property, and Roy is heir to it.

The old squire is very happy once more. The shadow that hovered over his home has vanished for ever, and now the abbey is filled with sunshine and perfect content.

THE END.

OUR HEROES.

Here's a hand to the boy who has courage

To do what he knows to be right;

When he falls in the way of temptation,

He has a hard battle to fight.

Who strives against self and his comrades

Will find a most powerful foe.

All honour to him if he conquer,

A cheer to the boy who says "No!"

There's many a battle fought daily

The world knows nothing about;

There's many a brave little soldier

Whose strength puts a legion to rout.

And he who fights single-handed

Is more of a hero, I say,

Than he who leads soldiers to battle

And conquers by arms in the fray.

Be steadfast, my boy, when you're tempted,

To do what you know to be right;

Stand firm by the colours of manhood,

And you will overcome in the fight.

"The right" be your battle cry ever

In waging the warfare of life,

And God, who knows who are the heroes,

Will give you the strength for the strife.

SUPERSTITIONS.

If an old broom is taken in along with the household goods, the new home will always be dirty.

The Irish saying is that if window shades are moved, the sorrows of the past will go too.

Upon entering a new house, if the owner passes someone on the stairs, a disappointment will follow.

If a jar of honey is the first food to be taken in, there will always be plenty on the board, but beware of a loaf of bread getting there first! It augurs that the occupants will, some day, want for bread.

Salt sprinkled on the hearthstone, the Welsh believe, will keep out the unwelcome guest.

To take the peacock feathers, it is said, means death in the house within a year.

To break a mirror in moving foretells not only seven years of bad luck, but seven successive disappointments within twelve months.

To take a cat means good-luck, and it is especially fortunate if a black cat comes in the first night.

To drink the health of the absent at the first meal in the new dwelling ensures their speedy return.

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Facetiæ.

PAT, for the first time at a hotel table, saw a boarder reach for the celery several times and placidly proceed to dispose of it. Pat gazed in dismay, and turned to his fellow countryman with: "Oh! moi! he's aitin' the bokay!"

"MARIA," said Brown, after they had moved into their new house, "we have a spacious back yard that ought to be put to some use. Suppose you get some poultry?" "No, John." "But why not?" "If our neighbours want eggs let them buy them."

AN INSIPID ROMEO.—Mrs. Hobson (discussing an amateur theatrical entertainment): "It's struck me, Mr. Oldboy, that Mr. Smith's Romeo was a very tame affair." Mr. Oldboy: "Necessarily so, my dear madam; Mrs. Smith played Juliet; you know."

A WOMAN was brought before a police magistrate and asked her age. She replied: "Thirty-five." The Magistrate: "I have heard you have given that same age in this court for the last five years." The Woman: "No doubt, your honour. I'm not one of those females who say one thing to-day and another to-morrow."

A GENTLEMAN from Manchester, who came to London not long since, had a commission from a lady to her brother, which he was anxious to carry out at once. "Where will I find Mr. B., who is in the grocery business?" he asked of a cockney. "There are two brothers of that name, both in the grocery business in Kensington," was the reply. "Which do you wish to see?" "I mean the one that has a sister in Manchester."

THE FORCE OF HABIT.—Socks: "Buskin, me boy, I was astonished to learn just now that you ran off the stage in the middle of a scene last night overcome by nervousness." Buskin: "A veteran like meself attacked by stage adright? By the gods, no! Go too, good Socks." Socks: "Well, what was the matter then?" Buskin: "A boy in the gallery gave so good an imitation of a locomotive whistle that I made an involuntary rush to get on the other track."

A BOY'S WIT.—Harry's mother had repeatedly reprov'd him from joking on the Lord's day, but with little effect. Last Sabbath he was guilty of the same offence, for which his mother took him across her knee and administered a wholesome spanking. "You naughty boy," she said, as he righted himself up again; "don't you know what day it is?" "I should think it was Palm Sunday," replied the little reprobate with a roguish twinkle in his tearful eye.

A MAN going home from his work at a late hour in the night saw that the occupants of a house standing flush with the street had left a window up, and he decided to warn them and prevent a burglary. Putting his head into the window, he called out: "Hullo! Good peop—" That was all he said. A whole pall of water struck him in the face; and as he staggered back, a woman shrieked out: "Didn't I tell you what you'd get if you wasn't home by nine o'clock?"

ONE OF FORTUNE'S FAVOURITES.—"Young man," he said, "do you respect the fair sex, as all young men should?" "I do, indeed," responded the young man, with emotion. "And there is one of the fair sex, sir, whom I not only respect but adore, and she adores me." "You are fortunate." "Fortunate is no name for it, my venerable friend. Why in the summer time that girl serves in an ice-cream and confectionery shop, and in the Winter she is cashier in an oyster shop."

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Gleanings

A FRONTISPIECE—the hotel clerk.

TAXES come high, but we must have them.

A QUESTION for newboys: Does your mother know your route?

GENTLEMEN learning the cornet should employ private tooters.

THE defendant in a murder case often hangs upon the judge's words.

THE tonsorial artist who colours whiskers get so much per dye 'em.

ALL men are not homeless, but some men are home less than others.

A FASHION article speaks of a "novel colour." We thought novels were generally read.

A WOMAN's heart is like the moon—is always changing, and there is always a man in it.

It's a great thing to have an indulgent husband, provided he doesn't indulge too frequently.

PUBLIC bathing houses are numerous in Japanese cities. In Tokio there are eight hundred of them, and the cost of a bath, hot or cold, is only a sum equal to the value of halfpenny.

THE prices of medical prescriptions in Russia are regulated by the Government. No druggist is permitted to combine three ingredients in a prescription, the cost of which is but one penny, and charge for it from 2s. 6d. to 5s.

THERE are over one hundred varieties of date-palm, all distinguished by their fruit. Dates form the staple food of the Arabs in a large part of Arabia, and are served in some form at every meal. Syrup and vinegar are made from old dates, and, by those who disregard the Koran, even a kind of brandy.

WHEN doubts arise regarding the ages of children on cars or steamboats in Switzerland, they are measured. All children under two feet in height are to have free passage; those between two and four feet are to pay half fare, and full fare is charged for all over four feet in height.

MOORING clothes are peculiar in Sweden. When a woman has lost a near relative; it is the rule for her to wear a dark veil and a dark dress, but with them she may wear a jacket of any bright colour, and red is most often preferred. Men dress in black coat, trousers and hat, but the vest is usually red.

PAUL KRUGER's daily tipple is beer, and he rarely takes alcoholic spirits. He once drank a glass of champagne at Bloemfontein, after the signing of an alliance with the Orange Free State. He looked surprised as he drained the glass, then snorted disgustedly, and champagne has not passed his lips since that day.

A NEW germ has been discovered. It is the wealth germ, and Chauncey M. Depew is the discoverer of the energetic little jigger. He says that the faculty which enables men to become rich is due to the existence of a minute animal which forces the fortunate gentleman in whose brain it lodges to engage in profitable industrial schemes.

A REMARKABLE fish story is related by a Georgia newspaper. A resident of Durango owns a bird dog which is especially good at fetching things out of the water. In order to show a friend what the dog could do, he threw a half-a-crown into the water, and told the dog to fetch it. The dog dived and brought back a two-pound catfish and is, 6d. in change.

A VARIANT of the legend of St. Swithin and the forty days' rain is that he was unfortunate in possessing a wife of a gadding disposition, who was resolved to go gossiping in July much against her husband's desire. The Saint punished her obstinacy with a continuation of rainy weather, which lasted during her whole excursion of forty days. But an Irish variant of the legend places the Saint in a most unpleasant light. He was—and apparently is still—in the habit of beating his wife for a period of forty days, and the rain is caused by the tears falling from her eyes.

MANY curious beliefs and superstitions exist as to lightning and the ability to turn aside its evil effects. Not only is there a common belief that the ringing of church bells, which has ended so disastrously at Palan, will avert evil, but, as in the time of Pliny, the wearing of laurel and bay is still thought to be efficacious in warding off lightning. The houseleek, too, so often grown on our cottages, is believed to be a defence. In some parts of the country, notably in Yorkshire, a very curious belief prevails among boys, that if any mention is made of lightning immediately after a flash has occurred, the seat of the speaker's trousers is torn out.

MATCHES are a Government monopoly in France, and are liable to be taxed at the rate of a franc per match if an attempt to smuggle them is discovered. These Government monopolies lead sometimes to the exercise of an almost childish tyranny. In Italy for instance, where salt is a monopoly, and is consequently at an exorbitant price, it is a punishable offence for the private individual to extract it from the sea water. But perhaps the quaintest result of all follows from the Government monopoly of tobacco in France, where a really extravagant fine is imposed upon the poor lover of flowers who dares to grow the sweet-smelling tobacco plant for his own pleasure in his own garden.

SCHOOLS FOR MATRIMONY.—To qualify young women for matrimony, an experienced matron suggests the establishment of schools wherein household science will be taught, and all the essentials for domestic happiness. These include:—How to cook; how to sew; how to take care of children; how to preserve your health; how to preserve your beauty; how to get on with your husband's and your own relatives; how to keep your servants; how to receive pleasantly the unexpected guest your husband unexpectedly brings home; how to be kind, though frank; how to keep no secrets from your husband, and to keep them from every one else in the world; how to economise without being niggardly; how to hold your tongue when your husband is angry.

THERE is a dog in London which turns out without fail to almost every City fire, and to many beyond the boundaries of the square mile. By breed he is a Great Dane, and he is the pet of the men at the Thames-street fire station. He came into their possession in a curious way. One day a gentleman called at the station, chatted with the men, and showed an interest in the engines. The dog was with him, but when he was leaving it positively refused to go. Said his owner to the officer in charge, "I shall call to-morrow, and if he refuses to come you may keep him." The dog declined to budge next day, and so became the property of the station. He has since been at almost every fire to which the men have turned out. Fire seems to be "in" him, as chemistry was "in" Mr. Eden Phillpotts' boy-hero "Nabby" Tomkins, but it has not yet led to his undoing, although he has run risks by entering burning buildings when no one was watching him.

Society

HIS MAJESTY has undoubtedly struck the right note in his expressed wish to assume an Imperial worth of the might and dignity of his great title Empire. "Sovereign of all the British Dominions beyond the Seas," has the right ring, and it was always Queen Victoria's desire that the Imperial note of her title should be emphasised, and the King, as ever, has carried out her wishes to the letter.

THE deliberate proceedings in connection with the Coronation of Edward VII. affords a striking contrast to the hurried ones of James II. He at once appointed a committee of the Lords of the Privy Council, which met on February 16th, 1685, just ten days after the death of Charles II., to consider the manner of the coronation. At this meeting the King presided, and the proceedings of the coronation of James I. and Charles II. were read. On February 19th, a commission was granted to consider the claims. At a meeting on February 23rd, a list of regalia was presented, and Sir Christopher Wren was directed to present an estimate of cost of scaffolding in the Abbey and in Westminster Hall. On the 28th, resolutions were passed concerning the dress to be worn by peers and peeresses. Charles II. must have possessed the gift of second sight when he apologised for taking so long a-dying.

THE Lord Chamberlain's department, though it has had a long holiday from Drawing Rooms, has employed some of its spare time in re-arranging details in connection with those hitherto all too dreary functions. The change of time from day to night, which is all in favour of the beauty of the scene, is not the only projected change. A greater control on the number of persons to be presented will be exercised, and there is a talk of a special invitation being issued to the debutante and to the lady entitled to present her. If these arrangements are carried out, the Drawing Room will become more of the nature of Royal parties, at which refreshments will, of course, be served. Another result of such a change would be that the cancelling of presentations will be a thing of the past.

THERE is a rumour that when the King looked over the regalia, which was especially brought for inspection from the Tower to Marlborough House, it was decided the unlucky opal should not appear in the crown, or indeed in any other of the Royal jewels connected with the coronation of the seventh Edward. The Duchess of Cornwall and York is, however, very fond of opals, and recently accepted some very fine Queensland specimens which, no doubt, will be seen on her return. It may be remembered that the late Queen had a very magnificent cat's-eye necklace, which she frequently wore when holding her drawing rooms, and which set in fine diamonds was a most beautiful and striking jewel. But there is always a difference of opinion as to whether the cat's-eye is or is not included in the superstition about opals; while even opals themselves are only considered dangerous wear for some people, while to others they are said to bring the greatest of good luck.

THE last of the surviving grand-daughters of George the Third, the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, sister of the Duke of Cambridge, has just entered upon her eightieth year. She and her brother are the last of George's grand-children. The Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz is a notable instance of the long life of pensioners. Upon her marriage in June, 1843, she was voted an annuity of £25,000, and has therefore drawn from the English Treasury already considerably over £170,000.

Statistics

In the year 1814, George Stephenson produced his first railway locomotive, which attained a speed of six miles an hour. Fifteen years later he quadrupled this speed, in his engine, the Rocket.

The pioneers of motor cars have made better progress, for in the few years they have been at work they have pushed ahead until now, a speed of ninety miles an hour on common roads, has been actually achieved, and one of a hundred miles is said to be possible.

AMONG military men, July is commonly known as the "month of battles." A glance at the almanac will show how well this title is substantial. Thus, on July 1, 1690, took place the battle of the Boyne; on July 3, 1860, that of the Koniggratz; on July 4, 1870, that of Ulundi; on July 11, 1882, that of Alexandria; on July 12, 1856, the commencement of the evacuation of the Crimea; on July 17, 1870, the commencement of the Franco-Prussian war; on July 20, 1888, the defeat of the Spanish Armada; on July 24, 1704, the capture of Gibraltar by Admiral Rooke; on July 27, 1689, the battle of Killiecrankie; and on the same date in 1809 that of Talavera; and, finally, on July 31, 1817, was fought the battle of Plevna.

Gems

A BEAUTIFUL woman pleases the eye, a good woman pleases the heart; one is a jewel, the other a treasure.

SLANDERERS and liars are twin brothers, born under the same star, living on the same planet, governed by the same unruly member—the tongue.

CHRIST never gave men definitions; He gave them paradoxes. A definition shuts you up at once, a paradox you can think about till the day of your death.

EVERY man who succeeds, inclines to ascribe all the credit to his own ability, shrewdness, industry; but when he falls he lays the blame wholly upon others, upon circumstances, upon fate.

Women who Worry.

THE woman who constantly worries is a very disagreeable person, not only to her family, but to all who come in contact with her. She seems to delight in having something to complain of—some annoyance which she usually describes with a pathos far beyond its importance. A great deal of her life is thus frittered away in conversation about annoying trifles that sensible people try to overcome and forget. Her nerves are always on edge, and she is fretful and irritable. There is no such kill-joy in the home as the always fretting, complaining woman, who sees only the dark side of things, upon whose world, apparently, the sun never shines. Everything is wrong, and nothing is ever right. Husband and children are made to suffer for the shortcomings of circumstances, and there is for no one within the four walls of such a home one chance in a hundred for even the minimum of happiness.

Many a woman of this distressed type began her married life a cheerful, light-hearted girl. Sometimes it has been physical suffering that has robbed her of her courage, and sometimes disaster and bereavement which were almost too much to be borne. But, nevertheless, the pain is not eased, the calamity averted, the loss made good by repining and murmuring. Some of the sunniest souls have been those who have been racked with torture from which there was no relief—bedridden invalids, and cripples confined to their wheeled chairs.

Helpful Talks.

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

My readers will do well to order in advance the 2000th No., which is ready next Tuesday, Aug. 20. It is a splendid pennyworth; in fact, the biggest budget of stories we have ever given at the price. The complete novel that is given away is well worth a penny by itself, and I have no doubt there will be a great demand for this really fine number. So order at once, and tell your friends to do the same.

HISTORIAN.—The fourth wife of Henry VIII., of England, was Anne of Cleves, whom Henry wedded with reluctance, to please the Protestant party, and make friends among the Protestant German princes. He divorced her in six months.

ELEANOR.—The Thirty Years' War was a religious and political conflict, which involved the German Empire, and with it the principal States of Europe, from 1618 to 1648. Sir Edward Cust's "Lives of the Warriors of the Thirty Years' War," published in London in 1874, is among the most recent and interesting of the works upon the subject.

CASHER.—The Bank of England was opened for business on January 1st, 1695. It immediately issued notes, none of which were, however, of smaller denomination than £20. On February 27th, 1797, the bank suspended specie payments, and then notes of the denomination of £1 were prepared and issued. The resumption of payment in coin took place on May 1st, 1823.

BESSIE.—The so-called hat flirtation is as follows: Carrying it in the right hand—desirous of acquaintance; carrying it in the left hand—I despise you; running the finger around the crown—I love you; running the hand around the rim—I hate you; wearing it on the right side of the head—no; on the left side of the head—yes; wearing it on the back of the head—I wish to speak to you; inclining it toward the nose—we are watched; putting it behind you—I am married; putting it in front of you—I am single; carrying it in the hand by the crown—follow me; putting it under the right arm—wait for me; touching the edge of the rim to the lips—does he accompany you? putting it on the head straight—all for the present.

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POLLY FLINDERS.—Anyone may adopt a child if the parents are willing to give it up; it is a matter of private arrangement. It is only in cases of baby-farming that the law interferes.

INQUIRER.—An engagement ring may be any kind of an ornamental ring, and its value should depend upon the circumstances of the donor. When it is the gift of a man of moderate means, an inexpensive circlet is all that is necessary; when the donor is a person of wealth, a solitaire or cluster diamond is most likely to arouse the young lady's gratitude.

WORRIED BESSIE.—Cockroaches may be got rid of by the use of spirits of turpentine. Apply it with a feather to their haunts of retreat, or put a little in a saucer and let it stand in the closet over night.

LAZY BONES.—The true pronunciation of any language cannot be learned from a book; all else may be mastered, and the rest will come very quickly to a person thoroughly versed in every part of the study.

MONA.—Yes, finding nine peas in a pod has a superstition attached to it. Nine is the chief of the three mystical numbers. Five and three are the others. According to Pythagoras man is a full chord—eight notes—then comes deity. Love is the deity that comes with your ninth pea. So lay the pod on the door-sill, and the first young man who steps in is your fated cavalier—so runs the fable.

ERMENTRUDE.—You had better trust to your parents in this matter. You are too young to judge of what is best. Do not marry at all until you are fully aware of your own true sentiments. After accepting a snitor you should not permit your fancy to be captivated by another.

LEONARD.—If you are positive beyond the possibility of doubt that your love for her is of the kind that trial only strengthens, and if you are certain that her love for you is now a genuine affection instead of merely the romantic attachment of a girl of fifteen, it might be well for you to endeavour to bring about a reconciliation. Many of the young lady's indiscretions were doubtless due to her youth and environment. As she grows older she will grow wiser, and will appreciate the necessity for education. But do not take any decided step in the matter until you are perfectly assured of her and your own feelings.

TIRED.—For swelled feet, bathe them in vinegar and water. If the feet become blistered by walking, rub them with tallow dropped from a lighted candle into a little spirits held in the palm of the hand. For burning and tender feet, use the following wash:—Two ounces of muriate of ammonia in powder, mixed with half a pint of vinegar and a quart of water, applied warm (not hot), morning and evening.

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"I WILL NEVER BE SENT AWAY," SAID GEORGE SIMPSON, RESOLUTELY, "UNLESS YOU TELL ME YOU CANNOT LOVE ME."

GEORGE SIMPSON'S LUCK

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

THE SUPPLEMENT NOVELETTE
COMPLETE

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE SIMPSON was a gentleman, although there was nothing at all aristocratic about his name. He came of a good family; but his father had been a younger son, who possessed, moreover, the recklessness and audacity to marry, on an income of two hundred a year, a girl without a penny. All the Simpsons who were well to do shook their heads at his folly, and dropped him at once. Perhaps he had been rash, but he never repented his imprudence. He lived long enough to see his boy in a position to earn his own living, and to feel sure George would take care of his mother.

George did his best, but the love which had endured, for five-and-twenty years of poverty, seemed stronger than aught else. Mrs. Simpson never recovered the shock of

her husband's death; and when, within three years, she followed him to the grave, her one regret was that she left George alone in the world.

At this time he was a bank clerk, earning a hundred and fifty pounds a year. He had lived in Eastford for most of his life, and yet he had no friends there. Unfortunately for himself, George had inherited the pride of the Simpsons, which, of course, ought to have been entailed with the property, since it was of no value whatever to the younger branch of the family. He loved his father and mother devotedly, but to everyone else he seemed indifferent. His fellow clerks voted him the proudest fellow going; the bank partners, while admitting his steadiness and ability, considered him a very disagreeable young man. He would make no acquaintances richer than himself for fear of being patronised. He had no pleasure in

the society of his inferiors. He would accept no hospitality he could not return; and so it came about that George Simpson was as lonely as it was possible for any young man to be.

He did not feel it while his mother lived. After her death, when the funeral was over and he went back to his desk at the Eastford bank, he had a strange, blank sense of desolation. He knew there was not a creature in the world who cared for him or his sorrow, and the knowledge saddened him, even though he realised that it was in part his own fault, since he had systematically checked all attempts at intimacy from his fellow clerks.

He went home to his tea, and it did not improve his temper to read in the *Morning Post* that Lady Simpson had given a "small dance" the day before. He quite forgot, in his indignation, that as his uncle, Sir Edmund, had not married till several years after the family quarrel his wife probably ignored the fact that Mrs. Simpson, of Eastford, was her sister-in-law, much more that the poor lady had been buried on the day of her party.

"I should like to be rich," muttered George, bitterly. "If only I could make a name for myself people would repent their insults."

Now, no one had insulted the bank clerk except in his own imagination; but George was in a melancholy frame of mind, and almost morbid on the subject of the neglect shown to his mother and himself. When the tea-things were removed, instead of getting his book and his pipe as usual, he put one hand to his head, and sat down to think seriously over his fortunes, and see if there was any chance of mending them.

He was not a mercenary man, but he was proud and ambitious. To rise to a position equal to that of the relatives who scorned him was his great desire.

Unluckily, fortunes do not come by wishing for them. Think as he would, George Simpson could see no royal road to success. If he left the bank he had no idea what he was fitted for. If he stayed there the only prospect of advancement was rising gradually to the position of senior clerk at two-hundred a year; and then, as soon as a vacancy occurred, becoming manager of one of the branch banks, with perhaps half as much again.

Even this post, the highest within his reach, would seem nothing in the eyes of the Simpsons of Park-lane and Lyndhurst Castle. George did not live in regular lodgings, but in a little cottage about a mile out of the town, where a woman, who had once been his mother's servant, was only too glad to let her best rooms to her former mistress.

The widow, who regarded the Simpsons almost as benefactors, since through them she had gained both home and husband, had given up the little front garden entirely to her lodgers—for Mrs. Simpson was fond of flowers, and George's one hobby was their culture.

Looking out of the window to-night, the desolate, neglected air of everything struck him. He had not touched the garden since his mother died. Already the weeds were springing up, and the flowers fading for want of water. Dismissing his dreams of fortune, Mr. Simpson exchanged his coat for a short tweed jacket, and, fetching his watering-pot and hoe, went out to the little piece of ground in which he had once taken such a pride.

"She would not have liked to see the place growing wild," he thought, half-mournfully, as he tied up the carnations, "or else I would never trouble about it again."

When he looked up from his work he caught sight of a girl standing outside the gate and gazing at the flowers, as though she could not take her eyes off them. There were few gardens in Eastwood, except such as belonged to the large houses, and were shut in jealously by high brick walls. The town for the most part was modern, and consisted of rows and rows of terraces, streets and streets of small houses, with no ground in front, and only a tiny back yard, utilised in general to dry the family linen after the weekly wash.

Mrs. Brown's cottage was a mile out of Eastwood. There were several similar dwellings to hers, but being occupied chiefly by working people, the gardens ran wild, and were given up to poultry.

The Simpsons had come to Ivy Cottage directly after the father's death; and Mrs. Brown, in her eagerness to make her old mistress happy in her new abode, had let George carry out any alterations he liked—a neat fence all round the garden, a division of wire netting to shut off the back yard with the clothes line and poultry, had been his first thought. Then he had spent a good deal of his spare cash in flowers and shrubs; one or two old trees already planted supplied the shade, and he chose, for the most part, those dear old-fashioned flowers that come up year after year.

This was the third June of his sojourn at Ivy cottage, and the air was fragrant with the scent of roses, carnations, and mignonette, while begonias, candy tuft and geraniums made the beds bright. A syringa tree was in full bloom, a honeysuckle just coming into flower.

Many people stopped to look at the quaint, peaceful spot. Admiration for his garden was nothing new to George, but he had never seen anyone look at it with such wistful, yearning eyes, as this girl.

She seemed but eighteen or nineteen, and her dress was plain, almost to poverty—just a blue and white cambric, a sailor hat, and black silk gloves; but the gown fitted perfectly; the ribbon on the hat had been arranged with tasteful fingers, and the gloves were neatly mended. She was a lady, evidently, in spite of her poverty.

He never knew what made him speak to her. George was not used to young ladies, and anything but an admirer of them; only the way she looked at his flowers touched him.

He wondered if she lived in one of the new gardenless streets of Eastwood, and if this was her first summer among bricks and mortar.

There was no one at Ivy Cottage now to enjoy his flowers if he gathered them. Why should not this stranger be gladdened with a nosegay?

He went up to the gate and made his offer

abruptly enough. George had no practise in the art of making pretty speeches.

"You seem fond of flowers. May I cut you a few?"

Her eyes brightened. They were beautiful grey eyes, with just a tinge of blue in their depths.

For one moment she blushed, and the colour lighted up her face, and made it lovely.

"I should be very pleased if you are sure you can spare them. My brother is so fond of flowers!"

"Is he ill?" asked George Simpson, as he began to cut his roses with no ungenerous hand.

"He is very ill," said the girl, sadly. "I was wishing to-night he could walk as far as here just to see your garden; it is so beautiful. When he was well we often used to come past here just to look at the flowers."

George started. Something in the voice struck him as familiar.

"I am sure I know you!" he said, simply. "I have forgotten your name, but I remember your voice perfectly."

"You knew my brother," she replied. "I do not think you ever saw me. Archie was in the Bank till—till Easter."

It came on Simpson then like a revelation—the young clerk, fresh from school, who had had a pleasant word or kindly smile for everyone.

He had been the favourite of all the young men who occupied stools in the Eastwood Bank; the first in every innocent piece of fun going on; and then, one Monday morning, he was not at his post, and they heard he had been thrown from his bicycle, and seriously injured.

There had been quite an excitement about it at the time. Mr. Fletcher, the manager, had talked of getting up a subscription for poor young Elton, and then someone had represented the lad was a gentleman, and had rich relations.

George Simpson did not think these last could have done much for Archie, judging from his sister's appearance.

The nosegay was finished now. The clerk tied it up carefully, and said a little awkwardly to Doris,—

"I wish you would let me carry it for you? Elton might like to see me. I know some of the fellows drop in to tell him the news, but a fresh face is a change."

"He would be very pleased. Yes, they used to come, but they got tired. You see, he has been ill so long now—nearly three months."

"But he will get better soon," said George, reassuringly. "People always get better when they are young and have good spirits, and I am sure Elton's were the best I ever saw."

Doris smiled sadly.

"I am afraid you will find him very much changed."

"What was it?" asked George. "I know he fell off his bicycle, but what was the injury?"

"Something to the spine," answered Doris, gravely. "The doctor says he will never walk again."

George was silent from sheer compassion. Never walk again! That bright-faced boy, who had seemed all life and motion, a cripple at barely seventeen! It seemed too awful! Mr. Simpson began to reflect there might be worse luck in the world than his own, after all.

"Have you been in Eastwood long?" he asked Doris, presently.

"Only since Archie got the clerkship."

"And do you live all alone?"

"We have lodgings in Mill-street. It is not a very nice part; but the landlady is clean, and attentive to Archie when I am

out. I have to leave him a good deal, poor fellow, for I am one of the teachers at Miss Frost's."

Mill-street was one of the dreariest parts of Eastwood—the houses small, stuffy, and confined.

George thought it would have made him miserable if his mother had had to live in such a place; but Doris Elton took the poor-ness of her abode quite as a matter of course, and her voice was almost joyous as she held up her flowers to the little bow window, and exclaimed,—

"See what I have brought you!"

George waited in the little passage, saying diffidently,—

"He may not care to see me. I ought to have been to inquire for him long ago; but —"

"You have had trouble of your own," said Doris, gently. "I am sure Archie will be pleased to see you." Then, in a whisper, "You will not let him know what I said about his spine. I have kept it from him."

It seemed to George Simpson more like Archie's ghost than the bright-faced lad he had seen three months ago full of life and health.

The fingers were thin and wasted, the face drawn and pinched, while the wistful eagerness with which the blue eyes fastened on the flowers made George regret he had not cut twice the quantity.

"It is very kind of you to come," said the boy, simply. "I get so tired of being here alone, and Doris has to be out so much."

Doris had taken up a piece of knitting, and the quickness with which her fingers moved convinced Mr. Simpson the work was done for money, not for pleasure.

"I should have come before," returned George; "but I never thought of it, and lately I have been in trouble myself."

"I know. We saw it in the *Gazette*. We were so sorry for you!"

It was the first word of real sympathy George had heard.

"You have lost your mother, too, perhaps?"

"Yes, she died when I was a baby. I have no one but Doris."

George wondered about the rich relations. Was it possible these two young things were alone in the world?

"You forget Cousin Jabez," put in Doris. "He means to be kind; but he is so used to London he does not understand how we long for the country. He got Archie his post at the bank, and he recommended me to Miss Frost. She is very kind."

"And have you any friends here?"

Archie smiled a little sadly.

"I think my illness has tired them out. They find it dull work sitting in this little room. Mr. Fletcher came once, but Doris offended him."

"I nearly turned him out of the house," confessed Doris, "I was so indignant."

"But what did he do?" inquired Simpson, who could not fancy the prim, middle-aged manager being dismissed by that young girl.

"He wanted me to send Archie to the hospital. Fancy sending him to a place where I could only have been able to see him twice a week!"

"It was abominable," declared George, with an energy which quite delighted Doris.

But the invalid looked graver, and when his sister had stepped away to take off her hat, he said, thoughtfully, to Mr. Simpson,—

"She cannot see the truth, and I have not the courage to tell her. The doctor thinks I shall never be any better, and it is not fair she should spend all her life and strength toiling for me."

"That's nonsense!" said George, flatly.

"She's happier with you to nurse and look after than she possibly could be alone. I don't wonder she was indignant with Mr. Fletcher. I'm sure I should have been."

He was a frequent visitor after that June evening. He would come in with a few flowers on a new book as naturally as though it was his right to be there.

Archie grew to look for his coming, and wonder how in the old days he could have thought Simpson stiff and cold. And Doris—well, Doris felt a strange, wistful sympathy for the only human creature she had ever met, who seemed even more lonely and desolate than themselves.

By degrees he learned their little history. George never asked a question, but as he grew more at home with them, he could gather their story pretty well from the stray remarks dropped from time to time.

A clergyman's children, they had been left penniless at his death, except for an annuity of fifty pounds a year, which her godfather had settled upon Doris. She was eighteen then, her brother four years younger. She gave up her little income that he might have two years more at school, while she earned a living as a nursery governess.

Then "Cousin Jabez" exerted himself for his poor relations, and found the boy the clerkship at Eastwood Bank, and the girl her position at Miss Frost's.

Their income was, perhaps, a hundred-and-twenty pounds all told, but on this they had been quite happy till the accident which changed Archie from a strong, healthy youth to a helpless invalid, and reduced their means further by the loss of his small salary.

George Simpson seemed quite to have forgotten his ambitious dreams. All through those summer months he was a frequent visitor in Mill Street. He cheered the invalid as no one else could do. He never tired of reading to him when Doris was busy. In fact, he had found a fresh interest in life, and about this time people began to notice a wonderful change in him.

"I never saw anyone so much improved as Simpson is lately!" said Mr. Fletcher to his wife. "He used to be as sulky and disagreeable as a bear. I thought he would grow perfectly intolerable after his mother's death, but it has softened him wonderfully."

"Good blood always tells in the long run," remarked Mrs. Fletcher, who never forgot she came of a very high family. "I always liked young Simpson."

It was about this time that Eastwood was shaken to its foundation by a series of the most alarming robberies possible to imagine. They began in early autumn at the Vicarage—a large house enclosed in spacious grounds, and containing many treasures of art and bric-a-brac.

It was the custom of all the servants to go to church on a Sunday evening, except one. Imagine the horror of the group, when returning one October evening, they found the cook lying on the kitchen floor, perfectly unconscious, her hands and feet tied together, basket emptied, a silver presentation inkstand and salver gone from the study, and the drawers of the vicar's writing table standing open, their contents having evidently been overhauled.

When Mr. Brett returned, which he did five minutes after his terrified servants, he sent one of them for the police, and another for the doctor. The latter promptly restored the cook, and gave it as his opinion she had been stupefied by chloroform.

The poor woman's own statement confirmed this. As soon as she could speak she said she had been sitting in the kitchen reading when a man came in. How he managed to open the outer door she had no

idea. She started up in terror, but before she could utter a scream he had thrown a dark handkerchief over her face. It was damp, and smelt like a chemist's shop. She remembered nothing more till she woke up on her own bed.

The vicar, much perplexed, went over his house with the police, and made, as carefully as he could, a list of the missing articles. As ill-luck would have it, he had cashed a large cheque the day before, as the next morning he had several parish payments to make.

He had left the gold in a small bag locked in one of his writing table drawers. Needless to say that every coin in it was gone. The plate was solid silver, and in itself of no mean value, but the presentation inkstand and vase, chased with skill and inlaid with gold, had cost hundreds of pounds. Nor had the robbers spared the upper part of the house. The vicar's dressing case and other valuables were gone. Judging from the amount of things carried off, the constable believed that the thief could not possibly have been single-handed, but must have admitted his accomplices as soon as he had overpowered the unfortunate cook.

It was a nine days' wonder in Eastwood. People who were not fond of church-going declared it was a warning to householders not to leave their premises so badly protected.

"Depend upon it we shall be the next victims," said Mr. Fletcher, the bank manager, to George Simpson, who happened to be in his private room on a matter of business one dark afternoon a month later. Simpson looked up quickly.

"I don't think so, sir," he said quietly. "Why not? No one seems to escape."

Three private houses, not counting the Vicarage; and the two leading shops of the place have suffered!"

"I fancy our safes would defy must burglars," persisted George. "Bonds would be of no use to them, since they dare not turn them into money; and the gold is safely hidden, thanks to your contrivances."

For since the robberies became so frequent, Mr. Fletcher, in a perfect panic, had caused the gold to be carried upstairs every night before closing, and locked in one of the upper rooms, on which he fastened a patent padlock. This was known to but two people besides himself; namely, George and the senior clerk. These took it in turns to remain after the others, and convey the gold upstairs to its new hiding-place, while they came alternate mornings, half-an-hour before the bank opened, to restore it to its usual receptacles below.

Poor Mr. Fletcher wiped the drops off his face. He was a stout, middle-aged man, who received a handsome salary as chief manager of Eastwood Bank, and all the smaller branches connected with it. The wholesale robberies in the town had almost driven him frantic with fear and nervous apprehensions, and George Simpson really pitied his anxiety.

"It's no ordinary thieves, depend upon it, Simpson," said the much-troubled manager, "else some trace of them would be found. What has become of the vicar's plate and ornaments? Where are Mr. West's jewels, or Mrs. Mander's furs and lace? Do you know the railway people declare no suspicious person has been through the station with any unusual amount of luggage?"

"It wouldn't be an unusual amount," returned George. "The thieves are shrewd enough to take only valuables that can go into a small compass."

Mr. Fletcher groaned.

"If you are going, Simpson, I'll leave at the same time. I have a kind of horror of

being the last person here. I believe I am nervous enough to come back half-a-dozen times to try the door, just to make sure I have locked it."

"I was going; but I can wait if you have anything to detain you."

"Nothing at all," declared the manager, rising with alacrity. It really seemed to George he was anxious to get away.

They went out together; but an old gentleman, with white air and venerable aspect was passing at that moment, and button-holed Mr. Fletcher, so that George went on his way alone. He was not sorry, for Mr. Fletcher's society was rather distasteful to him than otherwise; but he caught a full view of the stranger's face, and was surprised to find how unfavourably it impressed him.

Like many lonely men, George Simpson was a great observer, and like many proud natures, he was possessed of strong prejudices. He knew nothing in the world of Mr. Fletcher's acquaintance. He certainly bore him no grudge for depriving him of the manager's society, and yet, in that one glimpse, he had become imbued with the strongest possible aversion to the old man.

Was he really old? The question would return to George with unpleasant force. The stranger at first sight looked nearly eighty; his white hair was rather long, and fell on to his collar at the back. His skin had the shrivelled, parchment-like appearance of extreme age. His eyebrows were like snow; his form was bowed, his walk feeble and slouching, but (it was this which had impressed George Simpson so unfavourably), the eyes themselves were clear and dark. They had all the keen piercing gaze of a young man, and their expression was sinister.

They seemed so utterly out of keeping with his mild, venerable face, so unsuited to the tottering old man, that George Simpson felt a strange suspicion there was something wrong about their owner.

"I wish I knew who that man was," sped through his brain.

"Why, Simpson," exclaimed one of the other clerks, who happened to be passing, "one would say you had seen a ghost! What are you gazing after the governor for in that absorbed fashion?"

George roused himself at once.

"I believe I am catching Mr. Fletcher's panic about robbery," he said quietly. "I was wondering who would be the next victim."

"Nobody!" replied Rawlinson, lightly. "It is three weeks since the last, so I should say the thief had exhausted Eastwood, and departed to seek pastures new. It's a pity the governor's got into such a panic, and it won't make him any better to stand there talking to old Gregson."

"Is that Mr. Gregson? I never heard of him before; who is he?"

"You go through the world in a dream, and never hear anything that is not about business," retorted Rawlinson, "or you would know that old Gregson is a missionary, and that the governor has let Moor End Cottage to him for six months certain."

"A missionary! Eastwood is not heathen."

"Well, not exactly a missionary. Gregson has made a mint of money, and having neither chick nor child he likes to spend his time in good works and that sort of thing."

"I should never have guessed it from his appearance."

"No, that is rather against him. You know Moor End Cottage belongs to Mrs. Fletcher. Her mother used to live there, and when the old lady died they never dismantled the house, but just let it furnished

when they could. Tenants are rare in winter; so old Gregson's offering to take it from September to March was a godsend to them, and they jumped at it. He's a queer old boy, always talking about the wickedness of the world. He lives in the cottage all alone, with his man, who is a blackamoor, and speaks some language no one can understand. As for Gregson himself, I think he's sincere, though mistaken. He's often out from morning till night with his bag of tracts. He mostly starts on a Monday in some big town, and works it steadily through. He doesn't labour (that's his word, not mine) in Eastwood much; it's said the vicar objects to him."

"Mr. Fletcher seems to like him."

"Oh! they discuss the burglar scheme together. I don't know which of them is the most terrified. However, though Gregson is awfully rich, he never keeps much money in the house, so he can't feel in any danger."

George said good-day to his loquacious fellow-clerk, and went on his way to Mill-street. It was five months since he first saw Doris Elton gazing at his flowers, and those five months had made great changes in his life. George no longer felt existence a very dreary thing. He had quite given up his ambition of rising to a position which would oblige his cousins, the Simpsons of Park-lane and Lynfield Castle, to acknowledge him as an equal. In a word, he was going to follow his father's example and commit the folly (as the world would call it) of marrying for love a girl who had neither riches nor rank for her dower.

Doris Elton was just twenty one. She had youth, beauty, and sweet temper; one of the truest, sweetest natures Heaven ever made, but her worldly store was only fifty pounds a year, and she was encumbered, moreover, with a young brother, who would be dependent on her all his days. Something of this she said to George when he first spoke of his love. She did not call Archie a burden; she never thought of him as that, but she did say that Mr. Simpson ought not to take such a care on him—young, just beginning life, as it were.

George answered her by a smile. It was a lovely September evening, and the two were taking Archie for a ride in an invalid chair. They had left him where he could see the golden cornfields just ripe for harvest, and gone themselves to gather a bunch of the bright red poppies that grew among the wheat.

"I will never be sent away," said the young man, resolutely, "unless you tell me you cannot love me. As to what you say about Archie, I shall never be a rich man, but I think I can earn enough to keep my wife from want; and, Doris, I promise you that I would share all I had with him."

She blushed crimson.

"I could never leave him," she whispered. "I am all he has in the world."

"You are all I hope for in the world," replied George, "and I would never ask you to leave him—never while I live."

"It would not be fair of you."

"I am the best judge of that."

"You see," said the poor child, wistfully, "he will never be able to earn his own living, never be better than you see him now."

"I know that."

"And I could not bear it if we—came to you, and you grew to think him a burden. Do you know, George, if you got tired of him, and wished him dead—I think it would kill me."

"Doris, could you suspect me of such cruelty?"

"No; but Cousin Jabez offered to try and get him into a home for incurable cripples, and I would not let him go. I can't expect

you to feel as I do, George, but the very thought of it would kill me!"

George stroked her hand fondly.

"I think Archie likes me," he observed, presently. "We always get on together."

"He is very fond of you, but—"

"And if you married me he would not lose any more of your society than he does now—not so much, for Miss Frost claims a great deal of your time. Don't you see, Doris, as my wife you would be able to do more for Archie, not less?"

"Yes, but—I want to think of you."

"Do you? Then please listen to me; but tell me first, Doris, have I ever deceived you?"

"Never."

"Then you are bound to believe what I say. If you send me away you will blight my life, and make my future a dreary, hopeless affair. All I want is your promise to marry me as soon as I am a little better off. Before very long I hope to have two hundred a year. That is the income my parents married on, and I think we should find it enough."

"I am sure we should."

"Then you will say 'yes'?"

"There is one other thing," he said, after a pause—a long pause, which had transformed them into plighted lovers, and given them what seemed to both a foretaste of Paradise. "Before we are married I shall ensure my life, and settle the policy on you, and then you can make over your own little fortune to Archie. He will feel so much more independent if he has something of his own."

"George, I think there was never anyone in the world so generous as you."

And so the friendless man became engaged to be married, and his harsh, reserved manners softened wonderfully. He began to discover his pride was selfishness, and he made more friends that autumn than he had ever done before.

Archie, of course, knew of his sister's happiness, and gave his approval willingly. He was fond of Doris, but he clung to George with all an invalid's admiration for strength.

Mr. Simpson was hoping for a rise of salary at Christmas, and if it came, he had decided not to wait till his income reached two hundred, but to rush into matrimony at once.

He had saved money for furniture. He knew Doris would not be an extravagant wife, and it troubled him to see how white and fragile she was growing.

He could not bear to think of her teaching from nine till four, and then with the care of an invalid to fill all her scant leisure. It hurt him to see her ceaseless knitting, to notice the scanty fires, and poor attempt at winter wraps, which were all she could afford, and so he had quite decided when the "rise" came at Christmas to make her consent to a speedy wedding.

He had yet another reason. Dr. Parish, whom he had consulted privately in the character of a future brother-in-law, had told him Archie's disease was making rapid strides. There might be no visible alteration in the poor lad for some time, but his life could not be much prolonged, and before she lost her brother, George wanted Doris to be safe under his care.

He was surprised to find how much regret he felt personally for the doctor's verdict.

He had always accepted Doris's statement that, though Archie would never be any better, he might live for years as he was.

He guessed now that the doctor had not had the courage to tell the devoted sister the whole truth, but hoped the signs of increasing weakness would break it to her before the end came.

CHAPTER II.

MILL-STREET, as had been hinted before, was not a fashionable locality. Etiquette had no very rigid code there, so people were not at all horrified at George Simpson's frequent visits to the Eltons.

It was generally surmised that he was "after" Doris; but the matrons of Mill-street, if they gave the question a thought at all, considered her invalid brother quite sufficient chaperone for the girl; and Miss Frost, who, as an instructress of youth, might have had very stern views on the subject, had been so attracted years before by George's devotion to his mother that she not only graciously approved of the engagement, but even told Doris she thought her a very lucky girl.

Doris welcomed her lover with a bright smile; and George Simpson found himself forgetting all about the robberies and Mr. Fletcher's panic in the delight of her society.

Archie was better than usual, and the trio spent a very pleasant evening.

It was only when George was thinking of taking leave that the invalid complained of pain. Then, looking at him closely, George perceived a strange change in his face.

An indescribable fear filled the clerk's heart that this was the beginning of the end; and, wording his offer carefully, so as not to alarm Doris, he proposed to her to go and fetch the doctor before returning home.

"Do you think he is much worse?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"I hope not; but I don't like the look on his face. Besides, Dr. Parish might be able to give him something to ease the pain."

That settled it with Doris, and she was only eager for the surgeon to be fetched.

George started at once, but it was a long way to Dr. Parish's house, and he had to wait some time before he could see him.

"Young Elton worse!" exclaimed the doctor, kindly. "I'll go round and look at him, Mr. Simpson, but it's very little I or any other doctor can do for him."

His brougham was waiting. It had just brought him home from a distant patient's, and he invited George to a seat in it, saying quietly,—

"You will want to hear all I can tell you about him. I wish you had a mother or sister to be with Miss Elton now. I never saw a girl so utterly alone."

George shook his head.

"I am as friendless as she is."

"She ought not to be alone," said the doctor, gravely. "That poor lad may go off at any minute. She ought to have some friend staying with her. I have it!" in a tone of relief, as though a happy thought had struck him. "I will go to the Home, and get one of the Sisters to come round."

It was past eleven o'clock.

George suggested that the advent of a stranger at such an hour would give Doris more alarm than comfort. The doctor only shook his head.

"Miss Elton is a sensible girl. If this is the beginning of the end she will understand she cannot teach all day and sit up all night. For her brother's sake she will welcome help."

He sprang out at the lodge of the Sisters' Hospital, which they were then passing. One of the sweet-faced Sisters was even then passing through the gates.

A word or two to her and she entered the brougham, Dr. Parish explaining the need for her help as she went along.

"I will wait in the carriage till you have explained my coming to Miss Elton," said Sister Sarah, gently. "Poor girl, she ought not to be alone! Tell her I will gladly sit up with her brother."

George had been disposed to think Dr. Parish was taking too gloomy a view of the

case, and had rather resented the Sister's presence; but when he saw the change which had taken place in Archie during his absence he felt thankful for her help.

The boy lay in bed, his face white with pain. Low groans every now and then escaped him—the only sign of life.

Doris, a stony look of grief in her beautiful eyes, looked almost like a statue.

Dr. Parish wrote a prescription, and George hurried off to the nearest chemist's.

"It will, at least, soothe his pain," said the doctor, kindly. "And then, my dear, when he has taken the opiate, do go and lie down, and let the Sister watch by your brother."

"I cannot leave him!" said Doris, faintly. "He would not die in peace without me!"

"He is not going to die yet," said Dr. Parish, firmly. "It may be some weeks, certainly some days, before the end. If you do not spare yourself now you will break down, and be useless to him."

The Sister joined her persuasions, and Doris was overruled.

When Archie had swallowed the opiate, and seemed to sink into a heavy sleep, she suffered herself to be led away to her own room, and Dr. Parish and George left the house.

"I am afraid our ways are not the same, or I would have driven you home," said the former, pleasantly. "You won't have much of a night's rest, for it has long struck one."

"I shall call the first thing in the morning to know how he is," said George, eagerly. "Dr. Parish, do you think there is no hope?"

"Not the slightest," returned the other, promptly. "But—and by-and-by—Miss Elton will like to know this—after that accident last Easter it was only a question of time. If he had been a millionaire's son or a prince nothing could have saved him."

They parted cordially, and George struck off quickly in the direction of home, his heart pretty full of Doris, and his mind quite made up that she should be his wife before poor Archie died, even if he had to take her home to his rooms in Mrs. Brown's cottage.

His was a singularly quiet and regular life, and this was the first time he had ever been out so late. There was nothing priggish or effeminate about him; but, caring nothing for theatres and places of amusement, visiting nowhere but in Mill Street, where he always took leave as the clock struck ten, it came about quite naturally that there was nothing to take him abroad in the small hours of the night.

The chimes of the Minster rang out two as he passed it and turned into Eastwood High-street.

Never before had he seen that bustling thoroughfare so completely given over to sleep.

If there was a policeman, he had carefully hidden his whereabouts, for there was no sign of human habitation. It seemed like the dwelling of the dead.

Suddenly—he always felt afterwards it must have been an inspiration—he looked across the road at the compact red building which formed the bank.

There was a gas lamp exactly opposite, and by its light he distinctly saw two shadows flash across the blind of one of the upper windows.

He paused for one instant. That window belonged to the room where, according to the manager's latest hobby, the gold was secreted.

The sub-manager, a man of grey hairs and irreproachable character, always slept at the bank. In fact, he always lived on the premises, but it seemed impossible he

should get up in the middle of the night and patrol the rooms. Besides—it came back to George like a flash of lightning—William White was then absent on private business.

Those shadows on the blind meant mischief. He was as certain of it as though he had seen the thieves at their work.

The question was, how to proceed? If he went upstairs and confronted them alone they might overpower him, and make off with their booty.

The thing was to get help, but how could he make sure of them, and prevent their escape, while he went for assistance?

It was his turn to be early at the bank in the morning, and carry the gold downstairs. For this purpose he had the keys in his pocket. If the two burglars were in the same room and left the skeleton key, which doubtless, admitted them, in the lock outside, his course was easy, and he could take them in a prison of their own making; if not—but the chance was at least worth trying.

Putting in his key he noiselessly opened the door of the bank. Taking off his boots he went upstairs in his stocking feet to the room where Mr. Fletcher had chosen to secrete the gold. Every time the stairs creaked he felt as though the game was lost. At last he reached the door and found, as he had hoped, the key in the lock outside; and saw, what he had quite forgotten, that the door was fitted on the outside with two strong brass bolts. He slipped those in an instant, turned the key in the lock, and drew a breath of relief, as he realised that, whoever was shut up in the room, friend or foe, was a prisoner during his own good pleasure. He could hear the rattle of the sovereigns, which seemed to be being poured out of their bags, and he distinctly caught an angry question from one man as to whether his companion heard anything, and the contemptuous reply of the other that it was nothing but rats!

"Fine rats you'll find it," thought George, as he went downstairs to deliberate on his next move. The robbers being on the fourth floor, its windows moreover secured by iron bars, that they should attempt to throw themselves out seemed unlikely. The brass bolts would certainly keep them in bondage some time, but as there was no telling what tools they had with them it would not do to trust infallibly to this; but George hardly liked to go to Mr. Fletcher's.

The manager lived two miles out of the town; and, besides the delay the walk would cause, the poor man was in such an anxious, excitable state he could hardly be trusted to give prudent orders when aroused. The simplest course seemed to be to go to the police station.

Eastwood was a large town, but not so large but that the policemen in charge recognised Mr. Simpson at once not only as one of the clerks at the bank, but as a gentleman who lived at a cottage about a mile out of the town.

Although their failure in the case of the present robbery was fast giving the Eastwood police a bad name, they were in truth, poor men—very fair specimens of ordinary country town officials.

B24 touched his hat to George civilly enough, and said,—

"You're the last person I'd have expected to see, Mr. Simpson. What is wrong?"

"I want to speak to Sergeant Martin."

"He's just gone off, sir. If it's nothing out of the common I can attend to it."

George leaned forward, and spoke in almost a whisper.

"I believe another of those mysterious robberies is being perpetrated to-night,

and that if you are quick you will catch the thieves red-handed."

"Goodness!"

There was no doubt about B24's energy now. In a moment he had roused Sergeant Martin, and brought his superior to hear the story.

"Where is it?"

"The bank!"

The sergeant looked aghast.

"Mr. Fletcher has expected it long enough, but I never thought it a likely place myself, with a clerk sleeping on the premises."

"He's away," and George told his story, not forgetting the fact that he had caged the robbers in their own den securely.

"You're an honour to the town, sir," cried the sergeant admiringly. "If you think there's but two men in it, perhaps myself and B24'll be enough to manage 'em."

"I believe there are only two. I'll go back with you myself, sergeant."

They left B24 to guard the door, and went up together to the burglars. Once the door opened, they found their work cut out. The floor was strewn with gold, which the men had been pouring into black Gladstone bags when they were disturbed.

They were both apparently in the prime of life. One was dark enough to have passed for a Spaniard. The other was fair and clean-shaven, but, strange enough, had fierce, mocking black eyes.

He was the ringleader, and to capture him was a task which took every effort.

The sergeant almost wished he had brought more men, for the robber fought for his freedom desperately, scratching like a wild cat, and using a knife he happened to have on him, skilfully. But Simpson had overcome his adversary, and got the handcuff's safely on him, and so could come to the sergeant's assistance. Then they were reinforced by B24, whose duties as door-keeper were no longer required when both robbers were in their captor's power.

As for George, he was conscious of a faint, sick feeling, and that his arm was dull and heavy, while his clothes were stained with blood, thanks to the foreign-looking knife with which he had been attacked.

"Well," said the sergeant, triumphantly, "it's the neatest night's work I ever did, and you'd be a credit to the force yourself, Mr. Simpson. You've saved the bank a fortune in gold, to say nothing of these," pointing to the bureau full of bonds which the robbers had prepared to carry off.

"I wonder if they did the other things," said George, thoughtfully, quite forgetting that though handcuffed the prisoners were still capable of hearing him.

"Yes," said the man with the knife, coolly. "You may spare yourself further thought about the Eastwood robberies, Mr. Sergeant. My friend and I are answerable for them. We had no confederates and no assistants. We began with the Vicarage, and we succeeded with all we undertook until to-night. The game's up now, but there's no denying we've had a pretty good game. I don't know what other business would return thousands of pounds profit in less than two months."

"And where are the spoils?" demanded B24. "Where have you hidden them?"

"That, my good man, is entirely our affair," replied the other. "And, I may add, we do not feel disposed to take you into our confidence."

"You'd better go for the doctor, and look sharp about it," said the sergeant to the subordinate. "Mr. Simpson's fainting. When you've been to Dr. Parish, bring back one or two of our men, and we'll have these fellows in the cells in no time."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN George Simpson came to himself he was lying on the sofa in the manager's own room, and Dr. Parish stood watching him with an anxious face.

"That's right," he said, in a relieved tone, as the clerk's eyes slowly opened. "You'll do now. Do you know you have given us a fright?"

"I think I had one myself," said George, faintly. "Why," perceiving one arm was bandaged and in a sling, "what has happened to me?"

"Why you have been acting as a hero, and receiving rather an unpleasant arm-thrust from one of the men whose villainy you discovered."

"Ah!" in a weary tone. "And was I in time? Is the money safe?"

"Safe as possible; and here's Mr. Fletcher, waiting to thank you."

There was genuine emotion in the manager's voice as, pressing forward to the sofa, he said eagerly,—

"I shall never forget your conduct, Simpson. You have saved the directors thousands of pounds, and me from a remorse that would have darkened my life."

"It was only my duty," said George, simply. "And the sergeant fought splendidly. I hope he'll get the credit of it; and didn't the men confess they had been at the bottom of all the robberies here lately?"

"The beginning and end of them, the sergeant says," replied Dr. Parish, warmly. "But what they've done with their spoils no one can make out."

"Where did they live?"

"Came from London, Inspector Scott declares. He says they are notorious characters, who have been 'wanted' by the police for months."

"No one was safe from them," said Mr. Fletcher, mournfully. "Even my tenant, good old Gregson, who lives in my little cottage on the Moor, declared he could not sleep in his bed for fear of them. He gave me notice yesterday, though his time was not up till March, that he should be obliged to leave at once. He behaved very handsomely, paid his rent for the full term; but it shows what terror these men have made in the neighbourhood, that even a pious old man of seventy cannot live at peace."

There was no question about George Simpson having a holiday. His right arm was practically useless, so that he could not have performed any of his duties had the manager insisted on his coming to the bank as usual; but, to do Mr. Fletcher justice, he was only too eager to give the clerk a well-earned rest.

"I have telegraphed to two of our directors, and they'll be down to-day. I've no doubt, Mr. Simpson, they will mark their sense of your exemplary conduct."

George felt almost too ill to care. He wanted to go to Mill Street, but was warned he must attend the first examination of the prisoners before the magistrates, which was fixed for ten o'clock.

Nothing very important transpired. His evidence, backed by that of Sergeant Martin, left no doubt of the men having been on the bank premises with the intention of committing a felony. Dr. Parish testified to the injuries George had received from the elder of the two prisoners, and the vicar's housekeeper identified the other as the man who had come into the kitchen and stupefied her by means of a handkerchief steeped in chloroform. In fact, the two could do nothing against such an overwhelming mass of evidence, and they were both formally committed to take their trial at the forthcoming assizes. And then George Simpson was taken home by the kindly doctor, who assured him Archie was better, and that if he persisted in going

to Mill Street he would only be giving Doris two invalids on her hands instead of one.

For days after that George was very ill. Not only the injury to his arm, but the strain he had undergone, combined together to keep him low. For a week he was in bed, unable to move hand or foot, and lying for the most part unconscious; and when he came back at last, pale and feeble from the very gates of death, it was to find that Archie Elton had trodden that same valley, and Doris was alone in the world.

The bank behaved generously to the man who had served them so well. The senior clerk having been promoted to the management of a branch bank the directors gave George Simpson his post, with a free holiday until the first of February, and a handsome piece of plate, with an elaborate inscription, laudatory of his prowess on that November night, beside a purse of sovereigns.

Mr. Fletcher, who was not to be outdone in kindness by the directors, had a proposal of his own to make.

Mr. Simpson naturally wished to be married at once. He could not bring his bride to Mrs. Brown's humble abode. Why should the young people not occupy Moor End Cottage?

"It's as pretty a house as you would find in a day's journey," said the manager, eagerly; "and Mrs. Fletcher and I hope you'll accept the free use of it for the first three years of your married life. Time enough to talk about rent after that."

George Simpson's pride had softened under the influence of Doris Elton. He saw that the manager really wanted to serve him, and he knew that the Fletchers were rich enough to make the rent of Moor End Cottage a trifle to them.

Rawlinson had called the missionary's taking for it for six months a godsend to them; but this did not refer to the gain of money so much as to the house being off their hands. When it was unlet the airing and caretaking of it were perfect nightmares to Mrs. Fletcher.

George reflected he and Doris needed just such a home as Moor End Cottage. It would be a boon to go in at once without any buying of furniture; and without accepting the full extent of Mr. Fletcher's kindness, and occupying his house for three years rent free, it might yet be a great help to them to begin their married life there.

Doris put off her black dress for one day, and the two who loved so truly were married in Christmas week.

Mr. Fletcher gave away the bride, and his kind-hearted wife promised that when they returned from Hastings they should find fires burning, and a servant and provisions waiting for them at the Moor End Cottage.

"Just Simpson's luck!" someone muttered, enviously, as he drove off on his honeymoon. "Two hundred a year, a house rent free, and the prettiest wife in Eastwood. Some people are born fortunate."

Cousin Jabez did not trouble himself to come to the wedding. He sent Doris a plated teapot and his good wishes, which he thought was all that could be expected of him.

The bridegroom's kindred did even less, for they took no notice of him whatever on the auspicious occasion; but, then, what interest could the Simpsons of Park-lane and Lyndhurst Castle be expected to feel in a bank clerk and his wife!

As for George, the ambitious schemes which had filled his head at the time of his mother's death seemed completely to have vanished. He felt quite contented with his lot, and had discovered Eastwood boasts a good many nice people, and that he really

did not care in the least whether his relatives ever noticed him or not.

He and Doris would be happy in their own home, and quite forgot the fact that his grandfather had been a baronet of ancient family and large fortune.

They were to spend a month at Hastings, returning to Eastwood the end of January.

The purse of sovereigns had made this trip not only possible, but quite within their means.

They took lodgings in Trinity-street, and probably none of the people then enjoying the mild climate of the pleasing Sussex resort were happier than Mr. and Mrs. George Simpson.

They did not make many friends. They were more than enough for each other; but Doris, with the memory of the brother so lately lost fresh in her heart, took a special interest in an invalid youth they often met on the parade, drawn about in a bath chair, while beside it there usually walked a lady about forty, elegantly dressed, and with the remains of great beauty.

"I feel so sorry for her!" said Doris to her husband one morning, when they had just passed the little procession. "I think he is very ill. He has the same look on his face Archie had at the end."

"You are too tender-hearted, Doris," returned George, fondly. "You will have enough to do if you feel sorry for all the strangers you meet."

But in spite of Mr. Simpson's fond rebuke, the bride continued to take a warm interest in the mother and son.

One morning, as they passed the house while the landlady was in the room, she noticed the direction of her lodger's glance, and said, feelingly,—

"It's a sad thing, isn't it, ma'am? He's her only son—the only child left, in fact, of eight. She's been to Hastings year after year. First there was a happy, laughing family of children, but each winter it grew smaller, and now that boy, Master Adrian, as they call him, is the last left. They're lodging with my sister in Manor Square, and she says nothing can save him."

"But what is it?" asked Doris.

"Consumption, ma'am. It seems it was in the lady's family; and, though it passed over her, it's fallen on every one of her children. Her husband's a grand gentleman up in London, proud of his name and fortune; and they do say he's not too kind to her, and taunts her with the blight she's brought on his children. It may be that as much as the little ones' deaths that changed her so. Why, she was little more than a girl when she first came down here, and she can't be five-and-thirty now. That's her eldest child, Master Adrian, and he's fifteen."

"It's a sad story," agreed Mrs. George Simpson; "but surely it can't be true. No man could be so cruel to his wife."

"It's true enough, ma'am. Every winter now for eight years have they been to my sister's rooms, and every winter with one less. He's a proud, cold man, they say, and never cared much for the little girls; but his heart was just wrapped up in Master Adrian, the heir."

"Poor lady!" said Doris, pityingly. "What is her name?"

"Well, as to that, ma'am, her name's the same as yours; but though Simpson's not such a very uncommon name, I did think at first you might be relations, but my sister she said no. Lady Simpson had none of her husband's family left."

Doris had never heard that George's father was own brother to a baronet. She never dreamed that the landlady was mistaken, and the bereaved mother her husband's aunt. She did not repeat the conversation to George, but from that time

she looked with additional pity on the poor boy and his mother: feeling that, with such a husband, the lady's cup of suffering was full enough without the death of the last remaining child.

On the twenty-ninth of January the Simpsons went home to Eastwood, and Doris was delighted when she saw Moor End Cottage. It was one of those dwellings—fast dying out now—where comfort and convenience had been studied before show. There was ample accommodation for a small family, and yet all was so handy and compact that the work was well within the power of one servant.

The furniture was substantial, clean, and in good repair—oak for the dining-room, rosewood for the sitting-room, piano, book-case, writing table; in fact, all reasonable moderate requirements had been added, and on the landing stood a press, well stocked with household linen.

"George, it is just the home," whispered Doris, when she had made the tour of the house—it was too late to think of going through the garden—"I am sure we shall be happy here."

"Heaven grant it!" replied her husband, almost solemnly. He was thinking how wondrous had been his blessings through the last eight months. First, Doris and her love, which he valued most of all; then the gradual approval and confidence of his fellow men, which his pride and indifference had so long estranged; then his wonderful rise of salary—it had been nearly doubled—the directors' handsome present; and last, but not least, Mr. Fletcher's kind offer of Moor End Cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY had been home just a month when George was obliged to go to the county town, where the assizes were held, to give evidence against Messrs. Jeans and Newcome, the two burglars whom he had been instrumental in capturing.

He did not at all like the duty, and it was made still more irksome by the fact that the victims of the former robbery (with the exception of the vicar), though praising Mr. Simpson's valour as it deserved, were yet of opinion that if only pressure had been put on the thieves they might have disclosed what they had done with their plunder, and so a portion of it have been restored.

Mr. Brett was the person who told George of this feeling.

"You see," said the vicar, simply, "they don't see it was quite as much their place to protect their goods as it was yours to protect the bank's. My house was the first attacked, and I say, frankly, it served me right for leaving so many valuables protected only by one woman; but my misfortunes might have served as a warning to others. They might have redoubled their bolts and bars, or tried the expedient of a fierce dog. Instead of this, they did nothing; and when, in course of time, you discover burglars, they have a kind of injured feeling you might as well have done it before they were robbed."

George smiled.

"The truth is, Mr. Brett, my saving the bank was a fluke. It was the first time in my life I had been in Eastwood at that hour."

"I really believe Mr. West and Mrs. Manders would have liked you to let the thieves go free, on condition that they gave up their jewels and furs respectively. Of course, it is most unreasonable, but the missing diamonds were worth more than three thousand pounds, and Mrs. Manders is nearly ruined by her losses, so you must forgive them."

"If they only thought a minute they

could see it was the police who settled things, and I could not have made such a bargain had I wished it," said George, gravely; "but, Mr. Brett, it has often crossed my mind what did become of those things."

"Hidden away securely."

"But where? Remember, from the night you were robbed to the time these two men were caught was barely two months."

"Seven weeks and two days," said the vicar, who was very exact.

"And though Eastwood is a large place it has but one railway station. Now, the porters there are ready to swear they never saw either Jeans or Newcome leave the place with luggage."

"For the matter of that," said the vicar, drily, "the porters assert they never saw the men at all. If you are to believe the railway officials the two skilful robbers never reached Eastwood by train."

George looked at Mr. Brett gravely.

"I don't quite understand your drift, sir."

"Well, I'll put it plainly; only, Mr. Simpson, please remember this is between ourselves. I don't want a name for being suspicious of my fellow-creatures. Has it ever struck you that these two men always fixed on some propitious moment for their dastardly deeds. My house is never, as a rule, left to one woman servant. The page happened to be away on a holiday, and the cook at home alone for the first and only time. Mr. West openly confesses the assistant who sleeps on his premises had been to a party, and returned late, tired out. Mrs. Manders admits her robbery took place after the 'hands' had been up day and night pretty well to complete a mourning order; and you know yourself when the attempt was made on the bank the sub-manager, who usually slept on the premises, was absent. What do you make of all this?"

George guessed the vicar's idea at once.

"Why, the robbers, instead of coming backwards and forwards from London, were living here in our midst."

"What next?" pursued the vicar, coolly.

"Why, Eastwood people must be a worse set than I imagined to harbour them."

"Not a bit of it. Try again."

"I can't."

"Well, then, suppose—it is only an idea of mine—Mr. Jeans and his companion were so disguised that they not only lived utterly unsuspected, but that people actually took them into their confidence, and lamented to them the fears they had of being robbed."

"In that case," said George quickly,

"there must have been a sudden gap in our midst when these two men were arrested. Two citizens would have been missing at the same time."

The vicar looked at him sharply.

"I don't know that anyone disappeared unexpectedly, but Mr. Simpson, it is a known fact that a venerable gentleman became so alarmed at the repeated robberies that he warned his landlord he must move, and, I believe, paid up his rent. He did go the very day these men were arrested, but (no one else has noticed this) no one saw him go. He bade farewell to no one, and did not even trouble to send his landlord the key."

"Good gracious!" George exclaimed. "You can't mean Mr. Gregson and Moor End Cottage!"

The vicar nodded.

"I can't stir in the matter, because all Eastwood knows I disliked the man. He came into my parish with the reputation of a missionary, and I caught him teaching boys to fight and gamble, so that I struck a bargain with him to confine his religious ministrations to places beyond Eastwood."

But you are a clear-headed young man, Mr. Simpson, and I can see the coincidence between the arrest of the two burglars and the disappearance of Mr. Gregson and his servant has struck you so."

"One moment," interrupted George. "I should like to tell you that I saw Mr. Gregson once, and took an unmitigated dislike to him. There seemed something like an uncanny contrast between his fierce, passionate black eyes and his white hair, shrivelled complexion, and bowed, tottering form."

"I rather fancy," said the vicar, shrewdly, "an actor would tell you that they never selected a man with black eyes to 'make up' as a veteran. Hair, figure and complexion can be skilfully altered by art, but I never yet heard of any scheme for fading or quenching the fire of the eyes."

"Ah! Please go on."

"It may not seem much to you," said Mr. Brett, half apologetically, "but I own, to me, the proofs seem conclusive. When Mr. Gregson took possession of Moor End Cottage he had a great deal of luggage. I was at Eastwood Station the day he arrived, and I assure you that the old man and his servant had boxes enough for a large family. Where are they now?"

"I suppose he took them away?"

"No human creature saw Mr. Gregson depart," resumed the vicar. "From the time he left Mr. Fletcher, after paying his rent and giving notice, all clue to him fails. My own idea is that the raid on the bank was meant to be the last of the Eastwood robberies, and that in their assumed characters of Mr. Gregson and his servant, Messrs. Jeans and Newcome would have left the town openly the next day."

George looked puzzled.

"Admitting for a moment that these burglars were the occupants of Moor End Cottage, surely, leaving it as they did suddenly, there would have been some traces of disorder? Mr. Fletcher has often told me how beautifully neat he found everything."

"Yes; but remember the risks they ran. Depend upon it the cottage was left always ready for inspection. If they had secrets at Moor End they knew how to hide them. It is strange the secret, mysterious life the two men led. Neither master nor servant was ever known to buy a thing and have it sent home. They carried everything with them."

"They could not carry coals!" objected George Simpson.

"They never had any."

"But the cookery—the cleaning?"

"They never had any cooking. Such things as they could not buy ready for eating they went without. They always dined at the hotel. As to cleaning, an old woman was had in once a week to scrub the house from top to toe. She told me herself she did not like the job, because that black-moor, as she called the servant, never left her alone, but followed her about from room to room. I think the poor old soul fancied he suspected her of dishonesty."

George felt more impressed than he cared to own.

"I wish we did not live in Moor End Cottage. I don't like to think of my wife being alone there."

"These men are likely to be kept in durance vile safe enough," said Mr. Brett, kindly. "Besides, I may be mistaken. Even if I am right, there is no chance of their being free to return to the cottage for years."

"No," said George, in a low tone. "But what if they have left their plunder behind them—the boxes you spoke of, the spoil from your house and the other dwellings they robbed? How, if they have a secret

hiding-place at Moor End Cottage, where their ill-gotten gains are safely deposited?"

"That is why I spoke to you," replied the vicar. "I felt you would not scoff at my suspicions, and if there is any hiding-place of that sort at Moor End Cottage you would be sure to find it out."

"I think Mr. Fletcher would have been the right person for you to confide in," he said, rather stiffly.

"I know my man," replied the vicar, good-humouredly. "Fletcher would have fallen into a passion at first in defence of his friend—Gregson was a friend of his—and then come round suddenly to my idea, and wanted to pull the cottage down by way of apology. No, Mr. Simpson, if anything is to be discovered you are the man."

"And the trial?"

The vicar shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mind telling you that I got an interview with the prisoners, and taxed them with being the late tenants of Moor End Cottage, and leaving stolen property behind them. They took it very coolly—told me I had better go to Mr. Fletcher for permission to search the cottage, and that they felt it rather a compliment than otherwise to be mistaken for two such virtuous people as the old missionary and his devoted servant."

CHAPTER V.

PENAL servitude for ten years.

This was the sentence passed on Emilius Jeans and Gustavus Newcome for their raid on the Vicarage, their attempted robbery of the Eastwood bank, and their brutal attack on Sergeant Martin and George Simpson.

As for George, he often wished the vicar had not made that strange communication to him; for, try as he would, he could not get it out of his head.

Moor End Cottage was a perfect gem of beauty as the spring and summer advanced, but its master's enjoyment of it was poisoned by the idea that it might be the depository of stolen treasures. He did not trouble himself much as to what might happen when the two culprits were set at large. Ten years hence was too far off to alarm him; but night and day he was haunted by the thought that Jeans and Newcome might have had a third confederate, who knew of their plunder and its hiding-place. George had gone quite over to the opinion that Mr. Gregson and his servant were identical with the two convicts. Any doubt he might have had vanished after an interview with the old woman who had acted as their cleaner and factotum.

Summer had come and gone. Autumn had come, bringing the anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Simpson's engagement. There seemed every chance of a newcomer's arrival at Moor End Cottage before October was over. Doris went out for very few walks in these days, and spent most of her time sitting in the garden admiring the rich late autumn flowers.

"There never was a prettier house than Moor End Cottage," she said to George one Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Simpson agreed. He had never told his wife his own suspicions of the cottage's former occupants. Doris was pointing out to him the beauty of the rich, late dahlias, still a mass of brilliant bloom, and said presently,—

"They are said to grow so well because the well was just underneath; but Mrs. Fletcher told me last time she came that had nothing to do with it. She said the well was so deep that, after it was drained and emptied, they had to have the entrance bricked up, because it seemed hopeless to think of filling it up."

George did not seem to pay much attention

at the time. He went on talking to Doris of other things. But the strangest idea had come into his mind; and when Sister Sarah dropped in to spend an hour or so with Doris, he left his wife in her care, and went back to the garden to the site of the disused well.

It was some distance from the house, and not overlooked by any of the windows. George remembered, when they first came to Moor End Cottage, that particular plot of earth had been the only one showing signs of recent cultivation.

The dahlias had done credit to the careful preparation of the soil. They were quite a sight, so luxuriant was their growth, and yet George Simpson, by nature a flower lover, set himself deliberately to destroy their beauty.

He fetched a spade and dug up every one of the plants by the roots. Not content with this, he went on with his work until a large hole yawned, where only two hours before the bright autumn flowers had bloomed.

Suddenly George felt his spade come in contact with some hard, wooden substance. He dug a few minutes more, and then looked carefully down.

There, about three feet below the surface, was a firm layer of wood, not brick, as Mrs. Simpson had said, but a large flat boarding, on which the rich soil so admired by the gardener had been carefully arranged.

The servant, coming from the house with a message, was astonished to see her master with hands and clothes stained with mould, and the perspiration standing on his face in great beads.

"It's the vicar come to call, sir. Mistress thought you would like to know."

"Ask the vicar to come here," said George, simply. "Tell him I have something to show him in the garden."

"What in the world are you about?" asked Mr. Brett, when he reached the spot, following Mary's direction, and telling the damsel she need not attend him. "Have you lost some pet animal that you are digging a grave!"

"I am opening a grave, not making one," said George, gravely. "Mr. Brett, I am thankful for the chance that brings you here at the moment when I believe I have discovered Mr. Gregson's hidden treasure."

The vicar said never a word, but he quietly fetched a barrow from the tool shed, and began filling it with the uprooted plants and loose mould which were hindering George's movements.

"I never thought of this," he said, slowly, when at last they had disclosed a large round slab of wood. "You are sharper than I am, after all. Shall I help you to raise it?"

It took all their strength to raise the slab or cover. They then found it had hidden a large round hole, whose mouth had been filled up to within twenty feet of the top with bricks.

From the ending of the bricks to within a few inches of the cover the contents of this hiding-place were of the most motley description.

Several leather cases, such as jewellers use, two thin boxes hermetically sealed, various unshapely bundles wrapped in wash-leather, one of which the vicar handled with an air of approbation, saying, quietly,—

"And these are West's jewel's, and most likely one of these tin boxes contains Mrs. Manders' furs."

"What are we to do next?" asked George.

"It was a clever scheme," said Mr. Brett, slowly. "They must have known someone

familiar with Eastwood, and heard of Mrs. Hilton's well. After her daughter married Mr. Fletcher at his advice she had it drained and emptied, and gave orders for it to be 'filled up.' The last process took so much more material than she expected that she had it stopped some feet from the top, and the wooden cover made and screwed down. Those scoundrels knew this, and that if the screws were removed, and care taken against damp and rain the top of the well would be a safe hiding-place for the spoil of a dozen burglaries. But who in the world told them of the place?"

It was discovered afterwards that a girl who had been in Mrs. Hilton's service became Jean's wife. She, poor creature, was dead and gone before he made use of her artless reminiscences.

A law exists that half of any treasure-trove should go to the Crown; but the chief legal authority of the district decided that the accumulations found by George Simpson were not treasure-trove in the ordinary sense of the word, since it represented the property stolen from private individuals within a year; and, therefore, everything was restored, so far as it was possible to trace it, to its former owner.

The vicar got back his plate and presentation inkstand, Mrs. Manders her furs, and, in short, all the despoiled inhabitants of Eastwood had their property restored to them.

A very great deal has been written about ingratitude, but the inhabitants of Eastwood proved themselves quite above such a failing; for the first desire of the people whose property he had saved was to make Mr. Simpson a fitting present, and they were much disconcerted when he declined to accept anything at all.

However, about that time he received a present from another source—a bright and healthy baby boy—on which occasion the Eastwood folks decided that they would bestow upon the child a most gorgeous christening gift in remembrance of his father's genius. They kept the secret most carefully from the persons most concerned; but on the day of Archie Elton Simpson's becoming a Christian there arrived at Moor End Cottage a deputation, conveying a drinking mug of solid silver, with spoon, fork and knife of the same precious metal, all inscribed with the young Christian's names, and with the arms of the town of Eastwood. And Mrs. George Simpson opined that to refuse the offerings would be both ungracious and unkind, so that they were gratefully accepted, and the deputation invited to a private view of Archie Elton Simpson's perfections.

"You may say what you like," declared Mr. Fletcher to his wife that night at dinner, "but the beginning of Simpson's luck was my offering him Moor End Cottage."

George himself would have said that the beginning of "Simpson's luck" was his meeting with Doris Elton. The young couple remained at Moor End Cottage until Archie was two years' old, when, to the great regret of Eastwood, they migrated to London, for the poor sad-eyed lady whom Doris had pitied at Hastings was a widow. Sir Edmund had followed his eight children to the grave, and his nephew, the ci-devant bank clerk, was Sir George, a powerful baronet, and the master of Lyndhurst Castle and the stately house in Park Lane.

The Fletchers have visited Doris and her husband, and the brilliant accounts they give their friends of what they had seen and enjoyed, has made all Eastwood believe more fully than ever in Simpson's Luck.

[THE END.]